



RUSSIAN IMPACT ON CULTURAL IDENTITY AND HERITAGE IN THE
MIDDLE KUSKOKWIM REGION OF ALASKA

By

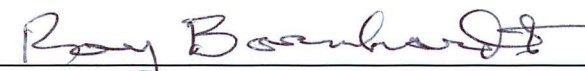
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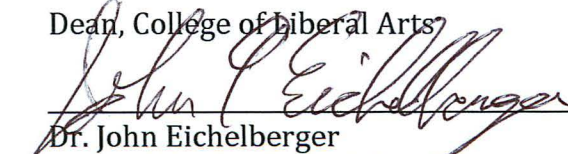

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RUSSIAN IMPACT ON CULTURAL IDENTITY AND HERITAGE IN THE MIDDLE
KUSKOKWIM REGION OF ALASKA

A
DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty
of the University of Alaska Fairbanks
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By
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Fairbanks, Alaska

May 2014

Abstract

The objective of my research is to document the role that Russian heritage has played in the individual and group identity of Native people in the middle Kuskokwim River region of Alaska. For purposes of this study this area includes the villages of Lower Kalskag, Upper Kalskag, Aniak, Chuathbaluk, Napaimute, Crooked Creek, Red Devil, Georgetown, Sleetmute, and Stony River. The changes and adaptations that occurred in the middle Kuskokwim River area during the Russian era 1790-1867, the changes that occurred with the sale of Alaska to the United States, and the continued changes up to the present time, including the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), all impact the heritage and traditions of today.

Today the middle Kuskokwim River region of Alaska includes Yup'ik, several Athabascan groups, Russian, and other European cultures. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Russian exploration, trading activities, and the Russian Orthodox Church changed the daily life of the indigenous population and added to the cultural blending of the region. That blending is evident even today, as Russian heritage has become part of the current Alaska Native cultural identity in the middle Kuskokwim.

My study asks the following research questions: What impact did Russian explorers, traders, and Orthodox clergy have on the middle Kuskokwim River region of Alaska? How has Russian influence changed over time, and how has this Russian heritage impacted present-day cultural identity in the middle Kuskokwim region? Included is the broader discussion of how people in the region define their identity and what aspects of that identity are most important to them.

Since I am using an ethnohistorical approach, I felt it was important to include an historical summary of the cultural change and indigenous adaptation during the Russian era and the changes brought about by the sale of Alaska, leading into more modern-day impacts. I interviewed 24 community members, focusing on

their indigenous and Russian heritage. Interviews with two nonindigenous scholars also provided additional information on the indigenous and Russian history and culture of the region.

From the semistructured interview dialogues, key themes and resonant narratives were identified. Those who were interviewed expressed indigenous values as the core of their identity including respect for elders and others, knowledge of family tree, respect for land and nature, practice of Native traditions, honoring ancestors, humility, spirituality, and importance of place. This helped me formulate an indigenous identity framework to illustrate the very complex pieces that influence identity in the middle Kuskokwim River region of Alaska.

In the end, Russian heritage has been absorbed into the local culture, especially in the area of religion, and has been indigenized into a deeply rooted sense of place and ways of being and expressing Native culture. It is this indigenous rootedness that is at the core of identity in the middle Kuskokwim.

Table Of Contents

	Page
Signature Page	i
Title Page	iii
Abstract	v
Table Of Contents	vii
List of Figures	xi
List of Tables	xi
List of Appendices	xi
Acknowledgements	xiii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Research Questions.....	3
Personal Perspectives.....	5
Purpose of the Study	6
Need for the Study	6
Historical Perspective	9
Chapter Overview	14
Statement of the Problem	16
Results	18
Chapter 2: Literature Review	21
Introduction	21
Precontact Indigenous Cultural Blending	23
The Russian Era.....	24
Cultural Change and Indigenous Adaptation During the Russian Era	31
Changes in Trade and Economy of the Area	31
Effect of Orthodox Christianity	36
Changes in Leadership and Social Structure	44
Changes in Values and Attitudes.....	47
Effect of Disease and Continuation of Epidemics into the 20 th Century	49

The Establishment of the Creole Class and Their Role as Cultural Brokers .	56
Who Were the Creoles?	57
Creoles as Cultural Brokers.....	59
Changes in Creole Individuality and Power After the Sale of Alaska	62
Changes in Religion and Education After the Sale of Alaska	67
Theories and Concepts: Issues of Memory, Identity, and Ethnicity	74
Indigenous Identity	81
Summary.....	85
Chapter 3: Methodologies, Theoretical Frameworks, and Research Issues	87
Introduction	87
Personal Perspective.....	87
Context of the Study	89
Collaboration and Research Protocol.....	90
Research Design: Methodologies.....	92
Research Design: Data Collection.....	94
Theoretical Framework: Effective Research	106
Theoretical Framework: Analysis.....	108
Limitations of the Study	116
Summary.....	123
Chapter 4: 20th-Century Impacts	125
Introduction	125
20th Century Economic and Social Influences	125
History of the Region, Late 19th Century into the 20th Century.....	126
Economic Development.....	126
Missionary Expansion	129
Modern Orthodoxy: The Selavik Example.....	133
Decline in Use of Indigenous Languages	138
Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA).....	140
Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB or CIB)	142
A Snapshot in Time	144

Summary.....	148
Chapter 5: Analysis of Interview Data, Russian Heritage and Indigenous Identity	151
Introduction	151
Discussion of Russian Heritage.....	152
Feelings About Russian Ancestry and Sharing That Knowledge With Their Children.....	161
Blending of Indigenous Native Groups in the Area, Principally Yup'ik and Athabascan.....	169
Blending of Catholicism and Orthodoxy in Many Families.....	176
Influence of the Holy Cross Catholic Mission.....	183
Physical Characteristics That Often Identify Russian Ancestry	191
Maintenance of the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian Prayer and Song Books, Building of Churches, and Practicing Orthodox Religion.....	193
Summary.....	206
Chapter 6: Analysis of Interview Data, Modern-Day Events Affecting Russian and Indigenous Identity.....	211
Introduction	211
Knowledge of Russian Foods and Words That Have Become Part of the Native Culture	212
Stories About Russians	218
Influence of the Cold War on Russian Identity	235
Distinction Between Russian and White/Caucasian Ancestry	236
Advantages or Disadvantages for Russian Ancestors	240
Effect of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) and Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB or CIB) on How People Identify Themselves	244
Summary.....	249
Chapter 7: Conclusion.....	253

Introduction	253
Resonant Narratives	255
"It didn't bother me"; "I am proud of it"	255
"Mixed up person"	256
Influence of Orthodoxy; "Do it their way"; Non Conflicting Values	258
Importance of Place.....	260
"I am a real Eskimo"; "We have to show how Native we are"; "Four-fourths"	261
Knowledge and Importance of Ancestors.....	262
Theoretical Perspectives on Identity.....	263
Summary.....	269
References	271
Appendices.....	285
Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter	285
Appendix B: Informed Consent	286
Appendix C: Additional Kuskokwim and Russian References	287

List of Figures

	Page
Figure 1: Alaska's Middle Kuskokwim River Region.....	2
Figure 2: Map of Western Alaska.....	4
Figure 3: Indigenous Peoples and Languages of Alaska Map (2013)	10
Figure 4: Middle Kuskokwim Showing Russian Settlements	26
Figure 5: 1886 Lithograph of Kolmakovskiy Redoubt	33
Figure 6: St. Sergius Church in Chuathbaluk, Early 1900s.....	70
Figure 7: Present-Day St. Sergious Church.....	70
Figure 8: View Across River From Aniak During Spring Break-up.....	90
Figure 9: Church Leader with Star Boy Spinning Selaviq Star.....	135
Figure 10: Icon on Wall in My Home	135
Figure 11: Father Vasilii Changsak	166
Figure 12: Kolmakovskiy Store and Blockhouse.....	227
Figure 13: Sergie Andreanoff Dancing with Wife Marie.....	232
Figure 14: Indigenous Identity in the Middle Kuskokwim.....	267

List of Tables

	Page
Table 1: Description of People Interviewed.....	100

List of Appendices

	Page
Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter	285
Appendix B: Informed Consent.....	286
Appendix C: Additional Kuskokwim and Russian References	287

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincerest appreciation to the many knowledgeable people who assisted me with my research and supported me during the process:

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for a fellowship during my final writing year.

My committee members for their guidance and critical analysis of my work: Dr. Ray Barnhardt, Dr. Beth Leonard, Dr. William Schneider, Dr. Craig Gerlach, and Dr. Lawrence Kaplan, Chairman, Department of Cross Cultural Studies.

Dr. Katherine Arndt for Russian information and translation.

Sean Topkok and Frank Chythlook, Alaska Native Knowledge Network for assistance with maps and technology questions, and Sandra Soren in the Cross Cultural Studies office.

Dr. Theresa John for assistance with Yugtun translation and interpretation.

Superintendent Brad Allen and the Kuspuk School District for their support throughout the years as I worked on my research.

Kuskokwim Native Association Elders Conference and area tribal councils, especially the Native Village of Kalskag, who wrote letters of support for my selection into the Indigenous Studies PhD program and application for Mellon Funding.

Rasmuson Library interlibrary loan department who assisted my research over the years when I was not on campus.

Community people who talked with me and provided follow-up information: Olinga Nicholi, Sophie Sakar, Dunia Holmberg, Miska Andreanoff, Evelyn Chamberlain, Edith Morgan, Okalena Morgan, Margaret Mute, Rita Savage, Polly Evan, Julie Zaukar, Vivian Sakar, Helen Kvamme, Julia Dorris, Nastasia Levi, Mike Savage, Father Nick Isaac, Steven Gregory, Martha Evan, and others who wished to remain anonymous.

Father Michael Oleksa and Ray Collins for their insight on Russian and Indigenous history and culture.

The people of Aniak and the Middle Kuskokwim, where I still call home.

My family, especially my daughter Andrea, who has always supported my efforts and for whom I hope this research is meaningful.

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandson, future grandchildren, and future generations of my family, who will always have roots in the middle Kuskokwim.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Change is a part of cultural adaptation, whether it is change from the blending of indigenous groups who come into contact with one another or resulting from a nonindigenous incursion. Change can also be the successful solution to a problem, and in this sense we can talk about effective adjustment or adaptation, with the caveat that not every response to change is adaptive or effective. Documenting and understanding cultural change is vital for understanding the cultural, social, ecological, and economic sustainability of any culture or community, not only to understand where it has been, but also where it is going. Change and the blending of cultures also impact individual identity and the set of characteristics that somebody recognizes as being unique to himself or herself. “Heritage is both how we remember and what from the past nourishes us in the present” (Schneider, 2011, p. 61).

In the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska, the merging of Yup’ik¹ and Athabascan² cultures, along with Russian contact, resulted in a unique blending and syncretism of culture and identity. Syncretism occurs when distinct cultures come together and borrow from each other, and it can be used as one venue for portraying the dynamics of social development. Cultures are porous and are open to intermixture with other different cultures, which makes them subject to historical change (Stewart, 1999).

¹ Yup’ik literally means “real person” (Jacobson, 1984, p. 416) and is the commonly used term for the indigenous people of the southwestern part of Alaska.

² Athabascan or Athabaskan (also Dene, Athapascan, Athapaskan) is the name for a large group of indigenous peoples located in two main southern and northern groups in western North America, and for the family of languages spoken by these peoples.

Much of Alaska lies in the arctic and subarctic region of the Circumpolar North. Alaska is home to various indigenous peoples. My research focuses on the middle Kuskokwim River region, which is part of the Yukon and Kuskokwim River basins of the Pacific drainage. Its climate is continental with cold winters and warm summers (VanStone, 1974). For purposes of this study, this area includes the villages of Lower Kalskag, Upper Kalskag, Aniak, Chuathbaluk, Napaimute, Crooked Creek, Red Devil, Georgetown, Sleetmute, and Stony River. Figure 1 shows the location of the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska.

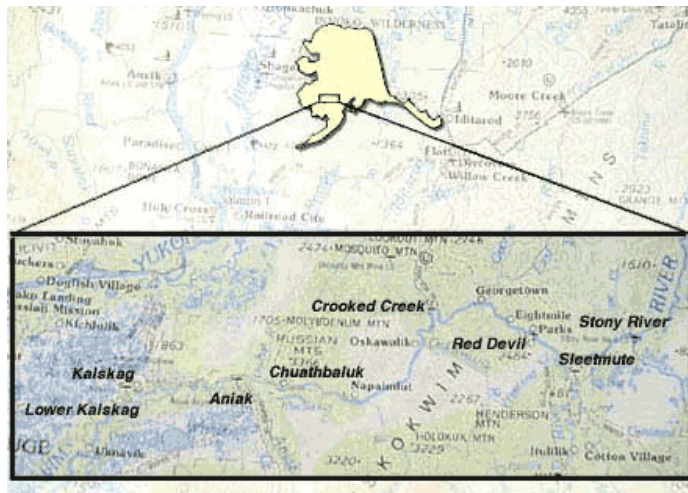


Figure 1: Alaska's Middle Kuskokwim River Region

Today the middle Kuskokwim region is a mix of Yup'ik, several Athabascan groups, Russian, and other European cultures. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Russian exploration, trading activities, and the Russian Orthodox Church changed the daily life of the indigenous population and added to the cultural blending of the region. That blending is evident today, as Russian heritage has become part of the current Alaska Native cultural identity in the middle Kuskokwim.

Research Questions

My study asks the following research questions: What impact did Russian explorers, traders, and Orthodox clergy have on the middle Kuskokwim River region of Alaska? How has Russian influence changed over time, and how has this Russian heritage impacted present-day cultural identity in the middle Kuskokwim region? Included is the broader discussion of how people in the region define their identity and what aspects of that identity are most important to them.

Figure 2 is a map of western Alaska, showing the indigenous language groups of the region and locations of settlements that are mentioned in this study, along with other villages in the area. It has been adapted from the Indigenous Peoples and Languages of Alaska map published by the Alaska Native Language Center in 2013. The language groups of the original map have been left intact. Russian settlements and historic villages and rivers that are referenced in my study have been added to the map. All locations that are referenced in this thesis are indicated in bold type to help the reader identify important locations.

Figure 2: Map of Western Alaska

Personal Perspectives

Just as documenting and understanding cultural change and adaptation is vital to our understanding of how a culture has evolved from where it has been to where it is going, so too is our understanding of our personal journey. I am a firm believer that we cannot know where we are going until we look at where we have come from.

I grew up in rural Wisconsin in the 1950s and 1960s and attended the University of Wisconsin at Green Bay (UWGB). Although I started my academic career in the hard sciences, I soon gravitated to social sciences with an interest in Native American studies, taking classes at UWGB and for several summers in the American southwest. I graduated in 1974 with a BS degree in modernization processes and cultural anthropology. I started graduate work at UW Madison, and during my first semester I took a class in applied anthropology. That made me want to really “apply” myself and I joined VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) and eventually ended up in Anchorage as a VISTA volunteer. I worked in Anchorage for a year and a half, then moved to Aniak in 1976. Over the next few years I was hired by Kuskokwim Native Association and worked with tribal councils along the Kuskokwim River, from Lower Kalskag to Lime Village. It was during those years that I began to know and appreciate culture and life in the region. In 1982 I began working for the Kuspuk School District in Aniak, and continued working with villages in the middle Kuskokwim region, where I have lived now for the past 38 years.

I have a personal interest in documenting the history and culture of this region. Over thirty years ago, after telling me a story, my daughter’s father, from Stony River, told me, “Someday you will be the one to write all of this down.” I doubted it at the time. In 2003, my daughter’s uncle asked me to “write down everything that I remember from my father before I die.” He told me, “My dad have

lots of good experience. I learn lot of things from him. And it's good I used to do that. You have it written down, not waste it, you got it." That documentation turned into my master's thesis, *Gusty Mikael: Legend of the Kuskokwim*. My continuing research is an extension of my previous studies, now focusing on Russian influence in the middle Kuskokwim region.

Purpose of the Study

The objective of my research is to document the role that Russian heritage has played in the individual and group identity of Native people in the middle Kuskokwim River region of Alaska; the changes and adaptations that occurred in the middle Kuskokwim River area during the Russian era, 1790-1867; the changes that occurred with the sale of Alaska to the United States; and the continued changes up to the present time, including the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) all impacts the heritage and tradition of today.

Documentation of the Russian impact, the resulting cultural changes, and the influences still seen today through people's cultural identity will add to the body of knowledge on the middle Kuskokwim region. Information on this cultural blending will add to the understanding of the cultural roots that support and sustain past and current life in the middle Kuskokwim.

Need for the Study

One way that indigenous knowledge is different from western knowledge is that it is more holistic (Kawagley and Barnhardt, 2007). The relationship between knowledge and experience makes indigenous knowledge dynamic yet still rooted in traditional wisdom. I would carry this a bit farther by saying that the interplay and relationship between knowledge and experience forms our sense of identity. The concept of place is also critical in forming our identity. We

name the important places in our existence, and traditional stories are referenced by place. Our families and ancestors are from a particular place. Place is a part of our living history and has an identity of its own. Place is linked to a people's self respect, and how people take care of their place shows the values they have. Our place gives us our identity and roots. We are not complete unless we know where we have come from (Basso, 1996; A. O. Kawagley, personal communication, July, 2003).

Basso (1996) describes the sense of place as meaningful and endowed with social importance. The idea of home and "our territory" includes entire regions and local landscapes where groups of men and women have invested themselves (their thoughts, their values, their collective sensibilities) and to which they feel they belong... senses of places also partake of cultures, of shared bodies of "local knowledge" with which persons and whole communities render their places meaningful and endow them with social importance. (pp. xiii-xiv)

Basso's study of place concentrated on the Apache of the southwestern United States. Basso's description of place names and stories associated with those places illustrated their deep cultural roots, which we see also in the indigenous cultures of the middle Kuskokwim.

Apache constructions of place reach deeply into other cultural spheres, including conceptions of wisdom, notions of morality, politeness and tact in forms of spoken discourse, and certain conventional ways of imagining and interpreting the Apache tribal past. (Basso, 1996, p. xv)

Kawagley and Barnhardt (2007) also discuss the depth of knowledge rooted in indigenous peoples' long inhabitation of a particular place. Native people have traditionally acquired their knowledge through direct experience in the natural environment, knowledge that directly influences their survival.

This active, ongoing relationship to the land and place continues even for those indigenous peoples who no longer live on their ancestral lands. One example is the sharing of “Native food” from the village to the city, which helps people stay connected to the land, subsistence lifestyle, and their relatives.

Although much has been written on the history and cultures of Alaska, the middle Kuskokwim region includes a very interesting cultural blend of Yup'ik, Athabascan, and European influences, with the earliest contact by the Russians. However, there is little information on local history and the cultural blending that is so much a part of the present culture. In a time where many local cultural traditions and language have been lost, students and the community want to become more familiar with their local history and culture. I believe that children need to be grounded in their past and rely upon their cultural roots as support in order to be successful adults (Barnhardt, 2011). The adaptation and resilience that they see in their ancestors can help guide them as they face their own challenges in their future.

There is a need to bring together various archival and anthropological studies on the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska, as well as local knowledge, using an ethnohistorical approach. In a multicultural world, ethnohistorical documentation is very important to societies. An ethnohistorical approach to research includes the use of written historical documentation as well as peoples' oral history. Thus the historical data is supplemented by the memory of informants and vice versa (Lantis, 1970, p. 5).

Krech (1980) emphasizes careful and critical analysis of ethnohistorical sources and urges caution even when using primary source documents, such as the Hudson Bay Company post journals, because such documents are often ambiguous, allowing for multiple interpretations (p. 2). Krech also stresses that “ethnohistorical data...must be collected and analyzed by those familiar with the documents of the region” and “primary ethnohistorical documents must be examined in detail and analyzed in order to test specific hypotheses. Arguments depending on intuition or

on comparative data, while useful, will not substitute for this type of precise ethnohistorical analysis” (p. 8).

Historical Perspective

My path to this cultural documentation first focused on the Russian era in the middle Kuskokwim, from first contact in 1790 to the Russian sale of Alaska in 1867. The first Russian contact in interior Alaska was made in the early 1790s by Vasilliy Ivanoff, a trader of the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company (Oswalt, 1980b, p. 9). Archival data includes the journals of Iakov Netsvetov and Lieutenant Lavrentiy Zagoskin. Netsvetov traveled the Yukon from 1845-1863 and Zagoskin traveled the Yukon and Kuskokwim from 1842-1844. These references, although written from a Russian colonial perspective, give us a glimpse of indigenous life at the time of Russian contact. Later ethnographic work by such researchers as Wendall Oswalt, Lydia Black, Ann Fienup-Riordan, Cornelius Osgood, and James VanStone also can be used to describe the indigenous cultures of the region at the time of Russian contact and some of the cultural changes that took place.

Although these historical and ethnographical references, and others like them, will not be thoroughly summarized here, those interested in further study may find the references useful.

Even before Russian contact, the middle Kuskokwim region was unique in its blend of Yup'ik and Athabascan cultures. In precontact times Yup'ik peoples gradually moved up the Kuskokwim, adapting to the riverine environment and Athabascan lifestyle. The traditional territories of three Athabascan language groups, Deg Xinag, Upper Kuskokwim, and Dena'ina, as well as Central Yup'ik, all converge in the middle Kuskokwim.³

³ It is interesting to note that local people refer to the languages of the middle Kuskokwim spoken by their parents and grandparents as Lime Village way (Dena'ina), Nikolai way (Upper Kuskokwim),



Figure 3: Indigenous Peoples and Languages of Alaska Map (2013)

Ray Collins, a well-respected scholar in Athabaskan culture and language who has lived in the Nikolai-McGrath area since 1963, describes the language blending as follows:

What happened, in that mid river region, through intermarriage, the Yup'ik language replaced the Athabaskan language. And Athabaskan is very difficult to learn. So what happened is that the Athabascans were very quick to pick up like Yup'ik or other neighboring Athabaskan language. They were often bilingual or trilingual but on the other hand the Yup'iks were not. If they were not raised in Athabaskan, they didn't easily learn Athabaskan. So at some point you've got people there of Athabaskan descent but they end up speaking Yup'ik because it was used over a broader area I guess and became the dominant language. (R. L. Collins, personal communication, May 2013)

Yukon way (Deg Xinag), and downriver way (Yup'ik). Past generations were often multilingual in indigenous languages as well as Russian and in later years, English.

This blending of traditional groups was also aided by inter-regional alliances. Burch and Correll (1972), in their study of northern Inupiat, identify two basic mechanisms for establishing positive relationships between regional groups, trading partnerships and intermarriage. Marriage ties were often stronger than partnerships, but partnerships were more common and readily entered into. Although both of these interactions were based on individual arrangements, extended kin relationships drew others into the group (pp. 25-28). The establishment of these partnerships was also important for the indigenous people of the middle Kuskokwim.

In the early 1800s the Russians moved into the Kuskokwim area in search of new fur resources. The numbers of Russians were few, establishing scattered trading posts and relying upon local people for furs. Thus the Russian incursion was less severe and disruptive than in the coastal regions of Alaska. What is also important for the middle Kuskokwim region is that many of the Russians that came into the area stayed and married into the local population. The children of these unions, referred to as Creoles, held a unique place in Russian Alaska as Russian citizens who were also part of the local culture.

The term “Creole” came from the Portuguese *crioulo* which means “bred, brought up,” and referred to a slave raised in a master’s house. The Spanish usage of the term was used to refer to anything of Old World origin that reproduced itself in the New World. Creolization thus indicated a connection between New World birth and deculturation. The Creole designation was also used to draw attention to the inequities of power, allowing European colonizers to broadly legislate the importance of race, culture, and environment in determining where one fit into a system where the Old World homeland and its subjects were the highest rank (Stewart, 1999, p. 44).

The term Creole in Alaska took on a slightly different meaning. Although the Russians did have the highest rank, Creoles were considered an entitled class. Most Creoles in Alaska were offspring of Russian men and Native women, although Creole

was a term of social rather than racial status and could refer to other mixed ancestry. Creoles in Russian America had the same status as members of the Russian burgher (merchant townsmen) and were considered Russian subjects. In the nineteenth century, Creoles in Alaska were established as a privileged class, a status that was demonstrated in their actions and contributions (Black, 1990, p. 147).

The need for interpreters in Russian America was critical to Russian success. They became the contact point between the two cultures to explain differences and smooth over conflicts, and their linguistic abilities and cultural understanding were essential to trade, evangelization, and colonization. Translation was a specific skill that no Russians were able to master, and so the small number of local interpreters who were successful at translation and who served as the conduit between Russian and indigenous groups were very much in demand, especially where colonial management was at stake. The translators were the interpreters of culture as well as language in the very multiethnic society of Russian America (Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, 2007, pp. 160-176).

From Zagoskin's travels in 1842-1844 (Michael, 1967) and Netsvetov's travels in 1845-1863 (Pierce, 1984) it is clear that the interpreters were invaluable as they traveled the Yukon and the Kuskokwim Rivers. The interpreters who were translating Russian into the local Native language (Yup'ik or Athabascan) were often Creoles. Netsvetov also referenced the help of local *toions*.⁴ "The conversion of the savages to Christianity was also aided in not inconsiderable measure by cooperation of the Ikogmiut *toion*...who was baptized (just a few months before) when the missionary visited there" (Pierce, 1984, p. 5). Others accepted baptism if the local *toion*, was baptized first. (Ikogmiut is the name of the Orthodox mission near present-day Russian Mission.)

⁴ In Zagoskin, (Michael, 1967, p. 80) *toyon* is defined as a "village headman". An alternate spelling, *toion*, is used in Netsvetov.

Interpreters working between the Russians and Tlingit in southeastern Alaska's Russia territory were not only Creoles who may have naturally grown up with exposure to two worlds, but also included Tlingit or other tribal captives who were sent off for years of Russian language training. It is also important to note that translators, earning their pay from one side or the other, may have had an agenda of their own affecting their non impartial perspective. This agenda would become part of the encounter and the filter between their clients. Questions of loyalty and accuracy of interpretation were an issue in many cases (Lutz, 2007, pp. 9-10).

The Creole status would change with the 1867 sale of Alaska to the United States, when the special status of these Russian-Native children was no longer recognized. The 1867 Treaty of Cession consisted of only seven short articles transferring the territory and dominion over property, with the exception of the churches, which "shall remain the property of such members of the Greek Oriental Church resident in the territory" ("Transfer of Alaska", 2012, Article III). Article III is also significant because it gave Russians the right to return to their homeland within three years or remain in the ceded territory. This article also distinguished between the rights of those of Russian ancestry and the "uncivilized tribes."

The inhabitants of the ceded territory, according to their choice, reserving their natural allegiance, may return to Russia within three years; but if they should prefer to remain in the ceded territory, they, with the exception of uncivilized Native tribes, shall be admitted to the enjoyment of all rights, advantages, and immunities of citizens of the United States, and shall be maintained and protected in the free employment of their liberty, property, and religion. The uncivilized tribes will be subject to such laws and regulations as the United States may, from time to time, adopt in regard to aboriginal tribes of that country. ("Transfer of Alaska", 2012, Article III)

The rights of U.S. citizenship for Creoles of mixed ancestry were sometimes called into question, especially where ownership of property or land was concerned.

One notable instance was in the case of John Mynook, a Creole from the Rampart area, regarding ownership of a mining claim. Judge Wickersham ruled in his favor based upon his citizenship by virtue of his being an inhabitant of the territory and also a person that the Russians had recognized as a citizen. What is also interesting is that the decision specifically notes Mynook's residence as separate from any tribe of Indians as well as his habits of civilized life. It was 1924, 20 years after the Mynook case, that the 1924 Citizenship Act gave Alaska Natives citizenship rights (Schneider, 1986, pp. 161-163).

The Treaty of Cession was continually used to evaluate indigenous rights such as who qualifies as a citizen, changing the way people lived to be legitimate. Alaska in essence inherited that structure from how the United States dealt with the western tribes, allowing very little room for indigenous people to work with the system (W. Schneider, personal communication, October 2013).

Today in the middle Kuskokwim region, many Yup'ik and Athabascan residents have Russian ancestors, the descendants of the Creoles. The knowledge of their Russian heritage is varied and influenced by time and circumstance. At times inquiries by the younger generation have spurred parental interest in this sometimes veiled heritage. Residents consider the Russian Orthodox religion as a major factor in both Russian and Native identity, with its unique local characteristics.

Chapter Overview

My literature review in chapter 2 includes the existing research and cultural documentation as it pertains to this study, specifically

- (1) Precontact Indigenous Cultural Blending,
- (2) The Russian Era,
- (3) Cultural Change and Indigenous Adaptation During the Russian Era,

(4) The Establishment of the Creole Class and their Role as Cultural Brokers,
 (5) Changes in Creole Individuality and Power after the Sale of Alaska,
 (6) Changes in Religion and Education after the Sale of Alaska, and
 (7) Theories and Concepts: Issues of Memory, Identity, and Ethnicity,
 including Indigenous Identity. My goal is to give the reader a good sense of
 the region's history.

Chapter 3 describes the methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and
 research issues used in the study and is divided into the following subsections:
 personal perspective, context of the study, collaboration and research protocol,
 research design methodologies and data collection, theoretical frameworks for
 effective research and analysis, and limitations of the study.

Chapter 4 focuses primarily on the changes in the late 19th and into the 20th
 century, including economic development, missionary expansion, modern
 Orthodoxy (the Selavik example), decline in use of indigenous languages, the Alaska
 Native Claims Settlement Act, and Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood. The chapter
 concludes with a look at an Orthodox gathering in Sleetmute in 1956.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on an analysis of the interview data using interview
 narratives. Chapter 5 includes interviews discussing Russian heritage and
 indigenous identity, while chapter 6 includes interviews examining modern-day
 events effecting Russian identity.

Chapter 7, my concluding chapter, includes a framework for examining
 identity in the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska, resonant narratives found in the
 interviews, and a summary discussion of the many factors influencing identity.

My research approach takes into account the uniqueness of the blending of
 Yup'ik and Athabascan indigenous groups as well as nonindigenous influences that
 occurred. The documentation of historical change that is available through
 traditional research practices can provide a foundation for knowledge but does not
 provide insight into present-day cultural identity. The key to the question of how
 Russian heritage has impacted present-day cultural identity in the middle

Kuskokwim region of Alaska can only be found through elder and community interviews.

Although much has been written about this historical process of the “Russification” or “Creolization” of the Alaska Native population, too little has been written about how this Russian heritage shapes the identity of the local people, and their present-day attitudes toward this Russian identity.

Statement of the Problem

Information on the influence of the Russian era in the middle Kuskokwim River region is primarily available in various academic ethnological studies and obscure archival documents. As stated above, the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska has undergone tremendous change and modernization in the last 200 years. Russian contact in the late 18th century, the cultural blending and adaptation that continued into the 19th and 20th centuries, and legislation such as ANCSA made tremendous impacts on the indigenous lifestyle.

The Russian colonization of Alaska, although brief, greatly impacted the local population. The blending of Russian and Native cultures can best be seen in the Creole offspring who were for the most part actively involved in the society and economy of the region and served as cultural brokers and intermediaries between the two divergent cultures.

The borrowing and adaptation of Russian words, which now have common usage in the Yup’ik language, is one example of the very early and long lasting Russian influence. Common Yugtun⁵ words from the Russian include words for coffee (*kuuviaq*), tea (*caayuaq*), cup (*caskaq*), school (*skuulaq*), and icon (*ikuunaq*),

⁵ When speaking of the Yup’ik language it is more proper to use the term Yugtun rather than Yup’ik, although people commonly use Yup’ik for both the people and language, as can be seen in the interview narratives.

just to name a few. It is interesting to note that the Yugtun word for white person, *kass'aq*, comes directly from the Russian *kazak*, which becomes cossack in English (Jacobson, 1984, p. 190).

The outward vestiges of Russian influence such as language, religion, and culture are fairly evident. The results of this cultural contact can be easily seen even today in the presence of the Russian Orthodox Church and the blending of Russian and Yup'ik traditions and language. What is more difficult to determine is how the Russian presence still impacts the cultural identity of local residents.

Before the interview phase of this research, I collected and studied archival data, and anthropological and historical publications to gain a working knowledge of ethnohistorical research, documenting cultural change along the middle Kuskokwim, including precontact cultural blending and trade, the impact of the Russian era on trade and economy of the region, effect of Orthodox Christianity, effect of disease, and changes in leadership and social structure. This research has continued, examining the historical and cultural impact of the Russian colonization of Alaska and the formation and actions of the Creole class.

Theoretical research has focused on issues of memory, identity, and ethnicity. Western definitions and perspectives have provided some thought-provoking concepts; however, it is important to also look at indigenous identity through people's own words of "who am I and how does Russian ancestry fit into my sense of identity?" Thus we must consider the problem from an indigenous perspective and look to indigenous research methodologies, philosophies, and value systems. This will be discussed in more depth in chapter 3.

As I progressed in my research and began the interview process, I realized that I needed to expand my historical research into more modern-day events. During my interviews and presentations to local gatherings, two issues became evident. First, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act had and continues to have an impact on how people view their cultural identity. Second, information on the early

history of the region was new and much appreciated, but people were also very interested in the more modern history of the region, asking questions about reindeer herding, mining, and missions. It is this more recent history that directly affects the lives of present-day elders and their parents' generation.

My research focuses on Yup'ik and Athabascan people of the region who have ancestors of Russian descent and how that ancestry has shaped their lives and identity. Documenting the present-day local perspective on this Russian heritage will add to the body of knowledge that is so much a part of our local history and culture.

I have lived in the middle Kuskokwim region for 38 years and have interviewed elders and others I have known for many years. I have a good relationship with the local people who were interviewed, many of whom I consider friends. The use of semistructured interview oral narratives provided a natural framework to discuss how people feel about their Russian heritage and how it has impacted their lives.

In conducting this study we must ask: Why is cultural identity important for people? Is it important to pass this knowledge to future generations and if so, why? The discussion of these issues brings up issues of memory, ethnicity, and identity with the focus on the indigenous perspective.

Results

My analytical framework utilizes theory and methodology in unique ways. The focus is on how indigenous views of ancestry and identity can be used to gain a better understanding of the effect of early Russian influence in the middle Kuskokwim region. I used as a starting point a theoretical approach building upon Wilson's (2009) three Rs of Respect, Reciprocity and Relationality as the guide for meaningful research. During my data analysis I looked at theoretical frameworks such as cultural resiliency where systems change, adapt, and continue to develop yet

remain within critical thresholds; and syncretism and transculturation, the combining of different religions and cultures into a whole that fits the situation better than the individual parts. Looking at interview data, it is imperative to use an indigenous research paradigm that takes into account people's ontology (the nature of being, existence, behavioral aspects), epistemology (knowledge, beliefs), and axiology (values). It is also imperative to use a model that keeps relationships in balance, such as Kawagley's tetrahedral framework centering on the balance between the natural, human and spiritual realms (Kawagley, 1995). Identity is shaped by telling stories (Thomson, 2011) but above and beyond that, stories are theory that can express peoples' ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Brayboy, 2005). Stories are the framework for individuals to think about identity, values, and knowledge.

Axiology is generally thought of as how people value what is right, their value system. However, the definitions of ontology and epistemology can sometimes overlap. Wilson (2009) defines ontology as the theory of the nature of existence, the nature of reality, and states that people develop an ontological set of beliefs; he defines epistemology as the study of the nature of thinking or knowing (p. 33). Brayboy, Gough, Leonard, Roehl, and Solyom (2012) say that ontologies refer to how we engage the world, and epistemology is used to mean how people come to know the things they know (p. 425). But they also state that behavioral aspects (ontology) are driven by beliefs (epistemology), which are framed by a value system (axiology) (p. 437). Thus it seems that beliefs can be considered part of both ontology and epistemology, and it is unclear where behavior falls. In my indigenous framework I am including existence and behavior as a part of ontology, and knowledge and beliefs as epistemology. Axiology of course is synonymous to values.

The sharing of culture and language in the middle Kuskokwim region, both in pre contact times between the Yup'ik and Athabascan cultures and later with the influx of the Russians, produced a blended culture and religion that has endured to present times. This can easily be seen in the actions of the Creoles who served as

cultural brokers between indigenous and Russian cultures and the adaption of the Russian Orthodox religion that even today incorporates traditional beliefs with Orthodoxy. As people define their identity they are drawing upon this blended past. Lines are blurred between traditional beliefs and culture and Russian influence. One example is the celebration of Selaviq, Russian Christmas, which will be further discussed in chapter 4. What is defined as Russian is strongly influenced by Yup'ik and what is defined as Yup'ik is strongly influenced by Russian.

The analysis of the interview data illustrates some trends that help to formulate a methodological concept to explain the data, make it meaningful, and make it applicable in similar situations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of my study is to examine cultural change and adaptation along the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska during the years of Russian contact and exploration, the Russian heritage that remained after the sale of Alaska to the United States, and how this Russian heritage has impacted present-day cultural identity in the middle Kuskokwim region.

The initial research question that focused my review of literature was to document cultural change in the middle Kuskokwim area during the time of Russian occupation. Specifically: What impact did Russian explorers, traders, and Orthodox clergy have on the middle Kuskokwim River region of Alaska? Through my research and in talking with elders I began to realize the present-day importance of this Russian legacy, thus driving my second research question: How has Russian influence changed over time, and how has this Russian heritage impacted present-day cultural identity in the middle Kuskokwim region? Included is the broader discussion of how people in the region define their identity and what aspects of that identity are most important to them.

Most interview narratives are included in chapters 5 and 6; however, a few quotes are included prior to those longer discussions. Names have been removed from the interviews. Numbers are used for all interviewee's names. When I have asked a specific question you will see my initials, CJ.

As stated previously, the Russian colonization of Alaska, although brief, greatly impacted the local population. The blending of Russian and Native cultures resulted in a group of people known as Creoles, who were for the most part actively involved in the society and economy of the region and served as cultural brokers and intermediaries between the two divergent cultures. The results of this cultural contact can be easily seen even today in the presence of the Russian Orthodox

Church and the blending of Russian and Yup'ik traditions and language. What is more difficult to determine is how the Russian presence affected values, attitudes, and the cultural identity of local residents.

As I began to further focus my research and think about how local knowledge could contribute to my research, I began to focus on the more recent time period after the sale of Alaska in 1867 and how the role of the Russian Creoles drastically changed. I found in casual conversations with elders that although people did not remember the Russia era, they did have grandfathers and great-grandfathers who were Russian and whom they remembered. They talked of these ancestors with a great sense of pride.

I very much wanted to incorporate local knowledge into my ethnohistorical study of the region; thus my objective broadened. The preliminary research into the impact of the Russian influence in the culture of the region evolved into gathering information on the Russian impact on the cultural identity and heritage.

Before the interview phase of this research, I collected archival data and anthropological and historical publications to provide a working knowledge of the region's history. My ethnohistorical approach includes documenting cultural change along the middle Kuskokwim, including precontact cultural blending and trade, the impact of the Russian era on the trade and economy of the region, effect of Orthodox Christianity, effect of disease, and changes in leadership and social structure. I examined the historical and cultural impact of the Russian colonization of Alaska and the formation and actions of the Creole class. Documenting the present-day local perspective on this Russian heritage adds to the body of knowledge that is so much a part of our local history and culture.

This chapter reviews the existing research and cultural documentation as it pertains to this study, specifically: (1) precontact indigenous cultural blending, (2) the Russian era, (3) cultural change and indigenous adaptation during the Russian era, (4) the establishment of the Creole class and their role as cultural brokers, (5) changes in Creole individuality and power after the sale of Alaska, (6) changes in

religion and education after the sale, and (7) theories and concepts: issues of memory, identity, and ethnicity, including indigenous identity. Research methodology will be discussed in chapter 3.

Precontact Indigenous Cultural Blending

The merging of indigenous cultures is not unique to the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska, with traditional boundaries between groups not being as firm as once thought. Ethnological researchers have claimed that the blending of Yup'ik and Athabascan cultures resulted in a unique riverine style of life that combined coastal Yup'ik lifestyle with interior Athabascan culture. In addition, the contact between the two groups was surprisingly peaceful. Oswalt (1962) stated, when referring to indigenous groups in the middle Kuskokwim region, that "these Eskimos [the Kuskowagmiut] have had, in the recent past, more contact with diverse Athapaskan tribes than any other segment of the Yup'ik population" (p. 1). Oswalt (1990) also claimed that:

Since the subsistence base was rich and no geographical barriers were encountered, the newcomers could proceed steadily up the river; when they met already established Indian populations, they found a compatibility with them that did not deter their penetration of the area. No other historic Alaskan Eskimos found conditions for venturing inland quite as favorable. (Oswalt, 1990 p. 14)

VanStone (1974) goes further to explain that:

The northern Athapaskans not only have made many specialized adaptations to the environment in which they live, but have exhibited considerable flexibility in their response to conditions within their total environment and to cultural impulses from neighboring peoples (p. 23). The way of life of the

Ingalik, Koyukon, Tanana, and Tanaina resembled to a marked degree that of riverine Eskimos throughout southwestern Alaska. (p. 42)⁶

Oswalt (1962, 1963, 1990) and VanStone (1974) describe the early movement of the Yup'ik peoples into Athabascan territory. The contact between the two indigenous groups was compatible, resulting in cultural blending of the riverine Eskimo and interior Athabascan lifestyles. The uniqueness of this blended culture that the Russians encountered had an effect on the acceptance of the early explorers, traders, and clergy.

The Russian Era

Oswalt states that the first Russian thrust deep into interior Alaska was made in the early 1790s by Vasilliy Ivanoff, a trader of the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company (Oswalt, 1980b, p. 9). VanStone described Ivanoff as the European discoverer of the Kuskokwim River, a waterway that was to play a significant role in the Russian fur trade in southwest Alaska (VanStone, 1988, p. 6).

In order to see the impact of the Russian era on the Kuskokwim, ethnographic work done by such researchers as Wendall Oswalt, Lydia Black, Ann

⁶ The Athabascan language groups used by VanStone (1974)—Ingalik, Koyukon, Tanana, and Tanaina—have been renamed and boundaries redrawn. In comparing VanStone's map on page 10 of his 1974 publication to the current language map produced by the Alaska Native Language Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, the previous Ingalik region has been renamed Deg Xinag and includes part of the Holikachuk and Upper Kuskokwim language groups. Other boundaries have also been redrawn, and the Tanaina region has been renamed Dena'ina. The current ANLC language map can be found in chapter 1 on page 10.

The term Ingalik was used by Osgood in 1936. While the term still appears in older references, today it is considered pejorative. The term Ingqiliq comes from the Yugtun word *ingqiq* for louse (lice) or nit and was traditionally used for Athabascan (Jacobson, 1984, p. 170).

Fienup-Riordan, and James VanStone can be used to describe the indigenous cultures of the region at the time of Russian contact. Information from four partially excavated archaeological sites located along the mid-Kuskokwim River is also available to help document the culture of the region.

At Crow Village, Oswalt and VanStone (1967) combined historical archaeology with ethnographic reconstruction and the use of historical sources. They found evidence of Russian as well as indigenous artifacts. Similarly, at Kwigumpainukamiut, Griffin (1989) and Redding-Gubitoso (1992) found not only artifacts but also house types that were indicative of Yup'ik, Athabascan, and Russian settlement. Kolmakovskiy Redoubt, the Russian fort across the river from Kwig, was a central trading center for the region that brought together indigenous and Russian traders and also served as a stopping point for traveling Russian Orthodox priests who performed baptisms and church services. At an excavation near Crooked Creek, archaeologists have found evidence of dwellings estimated at 2,000 years old and artifacts made from obsidian coming from hundreds of miles away.

In addition to ethnological studies, early archival references are also available, such as the journals of Iakov Netsvetov (Pierce, 1984) and Lieutenant Lavrentiy Zagoskin (Michael, 1967).

The following map of the central Kuskokwim (Figure 4), taken from Oswalt's (1980b) study of the ethnoarchaeology of Kolmakovskiy, helps show the location of the Russian trading centers.

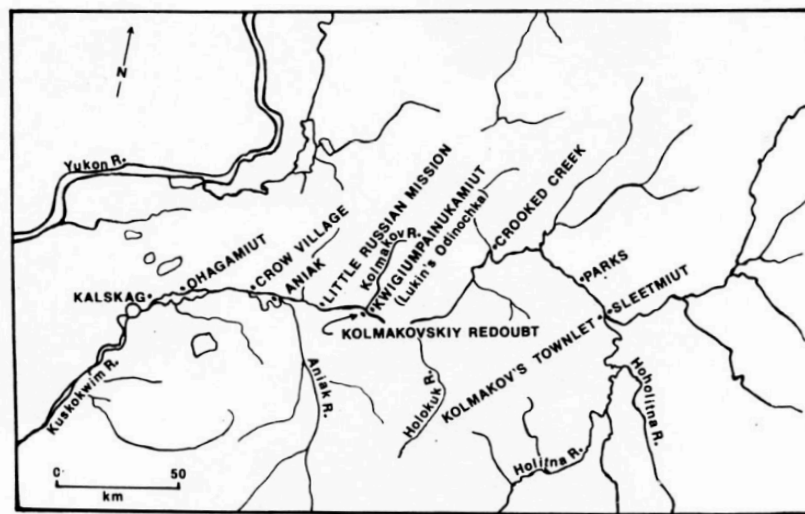


Figure 4: Middle Kuskokwim, Showing Russian Settlements

In addition to ethnological and anthropological studies, early Russian archival references can also be valid; however, we must realize that the documentation was done for a specific reason. The purpose of Russian exploration was to extend the fur trade northward into the Alaska interior. VanStone (1988) pointed out that during the early Russian explorations, Russian American Company officials specifically requested information on the Native inhabitants of the region, including the location of settlements, names of village leaders, and subsistence patterns. Explorers were also given instructions on how they were to act toward the Natives. Friendly relations with Eskimos and Indians were obviously essential for the advancement of the fur trade. Also described was information on the trade goods and the local people's interest in obtaining them. VanStone concluded that although the expeditions had an economic purpose, the information collected was a major contribution to understanding the history, culture, and environment of southwestern Alaska at the time of earliest contact. Similarly Russian Orthodox priests had the goal to baptize as many Natives as possible and convert them to Christianity (p. 11-14).

In contrast, the first Russian impact on much of the Alaska coastal population meant violence for indigenous peoples. The Russians in Alaska identified three classes of Native groups: dependent, independent and semidependent (Fedorova, 1975, p. 17).

Crowell (2011) also described three distinct zones of Russian impact. First, the “nuclear zone,” includes the area of first and most violent contact. The Aleutian Islands, Kodiak, and the Pacific coast were called “settled” or “dependent” in Russian colonial documents. This area had the largest Russian incursion and was marked by violence, including killing, hostage-taking and forced labor (pp. 88-89).⁷

Second, the Russian contact zone farthest to the east was with the “independent” Tlingit peoples. They resisted Russian occupation with armed force. The Tlingit were never disarmed and Russian relations with them remained fearful and dependent, as they supplied the Russians with basic food supplies (Crowell, 2011, p. 90).

Third, the Russian push into the Kuskokwim area in search of new fur resources was much different. The number of Russians was far fewer, establishing scattered trading posts without violence or the attempt to force labor. This was the “free-trade zone” within this large “semidependent” region. Native men and women received payments and were allowed to trade goods for their furs or labor (Crowell, 2011, p. 89).

Two main features distinguish the Russian occupation and rule in Alaska, especially in the middle Kuskokwim region. The Russians had at least some sensitivity in conduct with the Native peoples that was lacking in later English and

⁷ A Cossack, Andreian Tolstikh, “discovered” the Andreanoff Islands in 1743 and was the first to baptize Natives there. He kidnapped a young son of one of the chiefs of the Fox Island Aleuts and took him to Kamchatka where he learned to speak, read, and write Russian. “He returned to his homeland as a Toen (chieftan), a position granted him by the supervisor of Kamchatka. By his example, he greatly furthered the spread of Christianity” (Nichols and Croskey, 1972, p. 42).

American actions. The Russians also had a unique ability to completely adapt to local conditions, to live with the Native people, to wear their style of clothing, eat their food, and to intermarry freely. Unlike Europeans or Americans, Russians came as individual frontiersmen (*promyshlenniki*) without family ties or ideological commitments (Oleksa, 1990, p. 188). When we talk of the Russian occupation, we are dealing with only a few hundred men spread out over a 2,000-mile rim of settlement (Engstrom, 2010, p. 1). In an 1839 report on the condition of the church in Russian America, the unique circumstances of the interior were reported: “Their peaceful nature is shown by the existence of ‘solitary posts’ (*odinochka*), that is, places where one or two Russians live among thousands of these Natives. The Russians trade with them in peace and safety” (Nichols and Croskey, 1972, p. 54).

Another factor influencing the relatively amicable trade relations in the middle Kuskokwim is that the traders came to the Kuskokwim interior comparatively late in the game, at a time when Orthodox priests were more positively influencing Russian interaction with indigenous peoples. As mentioned above, when the Russians first landed in the Aleutians in 1745 they initiated an era of massacre, rape, enslavement, and exploitation. After the arrival of the Russian priest Father Veniaminov⁸ in 1824, the Russian clergy took a more active role as a positive force in the conduct of Russian-Native relations (Dauenhauer, 1997, p. 8). Russian and indigenous contact was not without its conflicts, but it was more cooperative in the middle Kuskokwim region than many other parts of Alaska.

It is important to take a closer look at the *promyshlenniki* from the standpoint of first contact and also because of their ethnic composition.

The *promyshlenniki* were Russian commercial fur hunters who were the first to explore Alaska. They were responsible for some of the violent contact in the Aleutians and Kodiak area, as referenced above. Black also points out, “It is well

⁸ Father John Veniaminov arrived in Alaska in 1824 and served for 15 years. In 1840 he was named as bishop of Kamchatka and Kuril Islands in Russia and the Aleutian Islands in Russian America. In 1850 he was elevated to archbishop. He died in 1879 and was canonized as Saint Innocent in 1977.

known too that some *promyshlenniki* acted as missionaries, and many administered baptism.” Some may have served as godfathers. “In Russian ideology, godparents are responsible for spiritual and educational needs of their godchildren. This obligation would extend to the children of an Aleut with whom such a ritual connection was formed” (Black, 1996, p. 50). This relationship often took the form of hostage taking.

Since the earliest contact, *promyshlenniki* brought young Aleuts to home ports, and some were educated in Russian schools. Initially many of these were hostages-*amanats*. As a rule, *amanats* were sons or close kinsmen (male) of the Aleut chiefs and leading men, and the preferred age was from 8-14 years. . . . By the 1780s numerous young Aleuts, sons of leading citizens, were sent by their fathers to Russia for schooling, along with the *amanats*. (Black, 1996, p. 62)

Oleksa states that most *promyshlenniki* were not ethnically Russian, a factor that added to the ethnic mix in Alaska. For the first 40 to 50 years at least one out of three of the so-called Russian fur traders were in fact Native Siberians. Another third were of mixed Slavic, Russian/Native Siberian ancestry, and only about one-third of them could really identify as ethnic Russians. They were subjects of the Russian empire, spoke the Russian language, and most were Orthodox Christian, but ethnically they were not Russians at all. This information was uncovered by Lydia Black when looking at Russian fur trading business licenses still on file in Irkutsk. There were never more than 800 to 900 Russians in all of Alaska, and two-thirds of them were Native or part-Native Siberians. Then when they started marrying Alaska Native women, it became even more ethnically mixed (M. J. Oleksa, personal communication, April 2013).

Black (1989) also describes the *promyshlenniki* as coming from Russia’s northern areas and having experience with the fur trade and sea mammal hunting:

A lesser but still sizable number came from Siberia and the Russian Far East and were often descended in part from native peoples, such as the Chukchi, Koryak, Yakut, Tungus, and Kamchadal. This is not always apparent in historical sources, since in Russia the ethnic ascription as well as civil estate was in the male line. (p. 46)

The *promyshlenniki* were well acquainted with the appearance, ways of living, and subsistence foods of the Alaska Natives and often adopted the local life style, with modifications:

They wore Aleut parkas and *kamleikas* (the waterproof shirt of sea mammal gut that is the prototype of modern rain gear), but added trousers, boots, and hats to their attire; they built semi-subterranean dwellings and storage structures, but instead of using the roof entry and notched log ladders, they added doors, foreroms, and windows (made of translucent sea mammal gut, which the Aleuts used to cover their roof hatches). (Black, 1989, p. 46)

In turn, the Aleuts also learned from the newcomers. Soon they were extracting salt from seawater, building steam baths, and learning the Russian language.

Znamenski (1998) points out that early Russian missionaries did not differentiate between Siberian and American Natives. The name the Russians used to describe the Native peoples of Alaska, *Inorodtsy*, was the same they used for the Native peoples of Siberia. Likewise, *toion* was used by missionaries as the name for both Alaska Native and Siberian chiefs, and *barabara*, their name for a Native dwelling, also originated in Siberia. These and other terms imply that Orthodox missionaries generalized about Alaska Natives based on their previous missionary encounters with Siberian Natives (p. 7).

Cultural Change and Indigenous Adaptation During the Russian Era

The Russian era brought changes to the middle Kuskokwim region that affected the trade and economy, religion, leadership and social structure, values and attitudes, and population, primarily decreases through disease.

Changes in Trade and Economy of the Area

Before the arrival of the Russians, trade items passed up and down the Kuskokwim River and across the portage near Kalskag to the Yukon River. In the upper Kuskokwim there were also contacts between the Dena'ina Indians of Stony River and the Nushagak Eskimos. Kuskokwim people traded furs for seal oil and other desired items that were not locally available (Oswalt, 1963, pp. 102-103). Chukchi and Inupiat Eskimo traders in Siberia transported reindeer skins, iron and copper manufactures, beads, and tobacco to the Seward Peninsula. From there, Alaska Eskimos carried the merchandise both north and south. Central Kuskokwim peoples also obtained Russian goods indirectly from Aleksandroviskiy Redoubt (Nushagak) in Bristol Bay and from Cook Inlet stations (Oswalt, 1980b, p. 7).

Annual trade fairs were important events that were accessible along river systems in western Alaska. Trade fairs were meeting places with singing and dancing, the distribution of presents, and haggling over transactions. Fairs were significant in that they provided a context where strangers could get together peacefully, renewing old alliances and making new ones. The gatherings were significant social events, sometimes lasting two to three weeks. Such fairs were held mostly in the summer in Kotzebue Sound, Norton Sound, and on the Yukon Delta. Goods from Siberia included iron tools and weapons, tobacco, metal utensils, and reindeer skins. Moving in the opposite direction were furs and manufactured objects of wood. The success of Russian trading activities in the region built upon a long history of indigenous trade and established relationships between Yup'ik and Athabascan peoples in the region (Burch and Correll, 1972, pp. 30-31; Hosley, 1981, p. 546; McClellan, 1964, pp. 11-12).

As stated above, the first Russian traders were independent *promyshlenniki*. In 1799 the Russian American Company (RAC) was granted a monopoly in the American territory claimed by Russia, which specified that the RAC would serve not only commercial interests but also the interests of the Russian state (Black, 2004, p. 255).

The establishment of the Russian Kolmakovskiy Redoubt meant a permanent presence in the middle Kuskokwim region and provided an operational point for Russian traders and clergy. Oswalt (1990) described previous attempts at establishing trading posts in the upper Kuskokwim region. Although beaver were plentiful in the upriver region, the local population was scattered. The number of Eskimos and Indians was much higher downriver and there were also good trails leading to the Yukon River. Therefore a trading station downriver at the junction of the Kuskokwim and Kwig rivers was established. At the village of Kwigiumpainukamiut, a three-room structure was built in the fall of 1833. This preceded the founding of Kolmakovskiy Redoubt across the river in 1841 (Oswalt, 1990, pp. 49-50).

Oswalt and VanStone (1967) described the impact of the establishment of the Russian trading center:

The transfer of trading activities to Kolmakov [Kolmakovskiy] Redoubt stabilized the trading pattern. The number of Russians occupied in trading activities was small, and consequently they posed neither a social nor political threat to the Eskimos. The traders maintained control over desirable products, and these could be obtained through trapping activities. The Russian traders seem to have asked little more of the people. It would be incorrect to regard the Kuskokwim trading venture of the RAC [Russian American Company] as a thriving business enterprise. Clearly the area was on the fringe of Russian New World colonial enterprise. (p. 5)

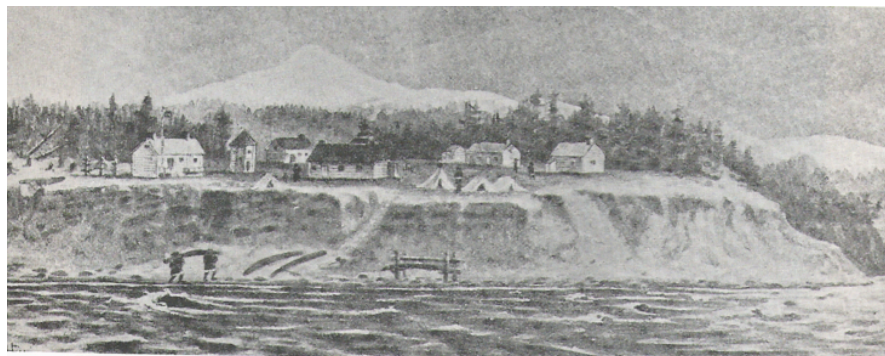


Figure 5: 1886 Lithograph of Kolmakovskiy Redoubt
(Published by Henry W. Elliot. Taken from Oswalt, 1980b, p. 188)

Kolmakovskiy Redoubt was one of the most remote stations of the RAC and was the only redoubt deep in the interior. It not only brought additional trading opportunities to the Kuskokwim and Yukon regions, but also exposure to Russian religious, recreational, and personal hygiene behaviors, as well as defense and civilian architecture (Dilliplane, 2010).

Even with the establishment of Russian trading posts, trading remained mostly in local goods, was built upon pre-Russian indigenous trade, was conducted mostly by traders of mixed Yup'ik-Russian ancestry (the Creoles), and was enhanced over time by developing long-term relationships with indigenous peoples. Athabascans from the Yukon area often brought not only furs to trade but oil, fish, and other supplies, which were scarcer on the Kuskokwim. Zagoskin stated that because of the difficulties in transportation, the amount of European goods traded was negligible and that most of the trade was in Native products such as deer skins, thongs, tanned sealskins, and fats (Michael, 1967, p. 255). After Russian contact, traditional trade continued with the few available Russian items added to the inventory (Townsend, 1979, p. 166). The Russians ultimately failed to convince local people to significantly increase their harvest of furs. Thus they were unsuccessful in developing a system of paternalistic dependence (Fienup-Riordan, 1994, p. 30).

Russian trade success was enhanced over time by developing long-term relationships with local people as a means of incorporating newcomers into the local system. Russians and Creoles (their “half-breed” offspring), such as Semyon⁹ Lukin, were integrated into the local system through trade and marrying into the Native population. An accepted structure was set up that included local Yup’ik values combined with the goals of the Russian American Company (Hilsinger, 2002, p. 86).

Trade was conducted in two ways. Natives came to the major redoubts or smaller trading stations. Some of the trading stations were managed by Natives who were trading partners of RAC employees. The second form of trade occurred when redoubt managers sent out trading expeditions. Here Native middlemen were also employed. As extraordinary as it sounds, Black (1984) states that the trade networks extended as far as the Copper River. “Semyon Lukin sent out trading parties annually to the upper Kuskokwim, where they had contact and traded with the people of the upper Copper River. He probably also penetrated the Native trade along the Tanana” (p. 31).

Even with the establishment of Kolmakovskiy Redoubt, the Russian traders still made use of more distant trading outposts. In the 1850s an *odinochka*, a small trading station, was established at Vinasale, near present-day McGrath, as a subsidiary post to the Redoubt. It continued to function as a trading location until the turn of the century (Oswalt 1980a, pp. 86-87). Dena’ina people from around Cook Inlet received goods at the Kenai trading post and came down the mountains in the spring to also trade at the Vinasale location. A trader would be given trade goods and stationed at Vinasale where he traded through the winter, and then in the spring he would go back down to Kolmakovskiy and pick up new trade goods. The Vinasale post was established to tap into the trade in the upper Kuskokwim. When

⁹ Alternative spellings include Semeon used by Black 2004, Simeon used by Oleksa 1992 and, Semen used by Oswalt 1980b.

the Alaska Commercial Company bought out the Russian American Company, they sent a trader up to Vinasale in the early American era. It was the first trading post in the upper river area (R. L. Collins, personal communication, May 2013).

The lack of Russian trade items was due primarily to how difficult it was to get Russian trade items into the middle Kuskokwim region. Even after the goods arrived in the Russian colonies, the Russians never succeeded in opening an access route to Kolmakovskiy Redoubt along which large cargos could be shipped efficiently. For the first four years, the supply route led south to Aleksandrovskiy Redoubt in the Nushagak region, but from 1846 to the end of the Russian era, the route was north to Mikhailovskiy Redoubt, near St. Michael. Access was by dog sled in the winter and small boat in the summer, both of which were difficult. Not until the early American period were trade goods shipped up the Kuskokwim River. Finally, in 1908 a deep-water channel into the Kuskokwim River was located and the first oceangoing ship docked at Bethel. About 1910 the first large wood-burning sternwheeler steamboats traveled up the Kuskokwim, which enabled the shipment of heavy goods as far as McGrath (Oswalt, 1980b, p. 41).

Initially guns were not a readily available trade item; however, the introduction of the rifle at some point also changed the hunting practices. With the use of a rifle hunters could take game at greater distances and more easily than with bow and arrow. The Russians also introduced new trapping techniques and additional metal tools.

Another change brought to the area was the introduction of western clothing. When beaver and land otter pelts became the prime trade items, fabric garments were more desirable (Oswalt, 1980b, p 110-111). Oswalt summed it up as follows:

The traders who worked there have a minuscule place in Alaskan history, and yet they were the ones who introduced the ways of the western world to the local people. What happened in the history at Kolmakovskiy affected all the Eskimos and Indians of the region. (p. 109)

Russia sold Alaska to the Americans in 1867. By 1868 Kolmakovskiy redoubt was abandoned; it had only been built 27 years before. After the sale, the Hutchinson, Kohl and Company operated a trading post out of Kolmakovskiy until 1917 (Charnley, 1984, p. 25).

Although the period of Russian dominance in the fur trade of the region was relatively short, less than 40 years, the Russian presence permanently impacted life in the area.

Effect of Orthodox Christianity

The established Russian trading centers were also used as important points of contact for Orthodox missionizing efforts. Iakov Netsvetov, an Orthodox priest, was stationed at the Ikogmiut Mission from 1845-1863. In the winter Netsvetov traveled from Ikogmiut (near present-day Russian Mission) by dog team and snowshoe to the Kolmakovskiy Redoubt; in the summer he traveled from the mission to Mikhailovskiy Redoubt (present-day Saint Michael). It is his travel between Ikogmiut on the Yukon and Kolmakovskiy Redoubt on the Kuskokwim that is most relevant to my study. During Netsvetov's travels he relied heavily on the Natives and Creoles at the mission and in the villages. There were chapels at Ikogmiut, Kolmakovskiy, and Mikhailovskiy; otherwise services were held in village *kazhims* (*qasgiq* or mens' house). Semyon Lukin and later his son, Ivan, who both served as managers of Kolmakovskiy Redoubt, also traveled extensively between the mission and the redoubt (Pierce, 1984).

Not only did Ikogmiut serve as the hub for the vast district, but it was also unique in that it was abandoned as a trading center by the RAC in 1845, partly because of the attack on the station in 1839, which killed the Russian traders. When Iakov Netsvetov was sent to Ikogmiut to take over the vast Kvikhpak¹⁰ mission it was

¹⁰ The Kvikhpak mission region stretched from Bering Strait to Dawson City up the Yukon River, a distance of 2,100 miles, and included the Ikogmiut at Russian Mission (Smith, 1980, p. 6).

distinctive because the mission was established in a Native village without RAC backup (Smith, 1980, p. 6).

In the middle Kuskokwim region, as in other regions of Alaska, the incursion of nonindigenous cultures brought about many cultural changes. One significant area of change was in the spiritual realm and in the influence and power of the *angalkuq*, or shaman. How a group makes sense of their spiritual, natural, and human world through rituals and ceremonies is key to their worldview. In the Yup'ik subsistence based worldview, a major concept is to show proper respect and behavior toward the natural world, especially toward the body and spirit of animals. This entails reciprocity and the maintenance of harmony and balance. The *angalkuq* was the spiritual leader of the community who acted as the spiritual go-between and mediator.

One of the most significant changes brought about by the Russian presence was the impact of Christianity, which severely changed the influence and power of the *angalkuq*. Some people consider the Russian Orthodox Church beginnings not from establishment of churches and missions, but from the martyrdom of Hieromonk Iuvenalii. Veniaminov's report stated:

Iuvenalii gave more in service to the Church than any of his fellow workers. He was killed by wild Natives. His death probably resulted as much from his prohibition of polygamy for those who were baptized, as from the fact that the Toen [*Toion*] and other tribal notables, at his request, gave their children to him for schooling at Kad'iak. The savages apparently changed their minds just as Father Iuvenalii was leaving, for they chased after him and fell upon him. (Nichols and Croskey, 1972, p. 43)

Most accounts and the Orthodox Church consider Iuvenalii as a martyr. However, Nikolai Rezanov's communication to the RAC in 1805 gives understandable reasons for the attack:

He [Iuvenalii] baptized them by force, married them, took away the girls from some and gave them to others. For a long time the Americans [Alaska Natives] endured his violence and even the beatings he gave them, but finally it occurred to them that it was possible to get rid of that monster, and, taking counsel among them, they ended by killing him. To be sure, he himself was not to be pitied, but they sacrificed to his cruelty the whole artel of Russians and Kodiakians, not leaving one of them alive. (Nichols and Croskey, 1972, p. 43)

Oleksa, however, questions Rezanov's account:

Rezanov's account is replete with distortions and fabrications. . . . That the clergy were inciting the Natives to assert their freedom and that the company insisted that they obey Baranov's orders indicates where the real issues lay. Hieromonk Iuvenalii traveled alone and unarmed, so that it was beyond his personal strength to force anyone to submit to baptism. Two centuries after his visit, the villages he baptized have remained overwhelmingly loyal to Orthodoxy. (Oleksa, 1992, p. 226)

Although there has also been academic discussion about the actual location of Iuvenalii's death, one story is told that after his death in 1796, when an important man, probably a shaman, put on Iuvenalii's cross he was bodily elevated and held fast in the air. The shaman then proclaimed that the murdered man obviously had power and that the next time others like him should come, they should be received in peace and their message listened to (Black, 1981; Black, 1984, p. 33; Oleksa, 1992, pp. 113-114). Other accounts mention a column of smoke stretching to heaven from his remains (Nichols and Croskey, 1972, p. 43). Many feel this was the beginning of acceptance of the Russian Orthodox religion. However even much later, almost at the end of the Russian occupation, Father Illarion traveled throughout the middle

Kuskokwim region in 1861-1862 and still encountered resistance to giving up shamanism (Oswalt, 1960, p.113).

Father Michael Oleksa disagrees that the Orthodox Church actively promoted the abolishment of shamanism. He challenges existing theory that Orthodoxy was in direct conflict with shamanism:

The Church as a body, as an institution never took a very dim view of shamans, just because they realized these were healers that people needed healers. Veniaminov sat down with his shaman in the 1820s already and talked shop. Saint Herman on Kodiak Island sent the shaman to the priest's house because the priest's daughter was sick and maybe he can help her. The shaman says but "I'm a shaman." Saint Herman says "What does that have to do with it, you're a healer aren't you, go see if you can help the girl." So there was a respect for the healing powers and a responsibility. . . . There was never a blanket antishaman policy. In fact just the opposite. Veniaminov sat down with his shaman, [Smirennikov] was almost convinced that the shaman was in touch with heavenly spiritual powers, like angels. (M. J. Oleksa, personal communication, April 2013)

Oleksa (1992) describes Veniaminov's account of Smirennikov's ability to cure illnesses and that he possessed wonderful prophetic occult powers. Smirennikov told Veniaminov that after he was first baptized by Father Makarii, two men sent by God began to appear to him almost daily, telling him to pray to God for assistance in sickness and distress. Veniaminov told Smirennikov that these were good spirits and that he should follow their teachings and tell the people that it was not Smirennikov who gives this help, but God (p. 130-132).

Mousalimas (2003) also talks about Veniaminov's relationship with Smirennikov, but he differentiates him from typical shamans and determined that the spirits he was seeing were not demons (p. 156-161). Mousalimas also states that later "Veniaminov would require that an actual shaman should promise to cease

practicing when that one sought baptism from him in the Nushagak region” (Mousalimas, 2003, p. 177).

Black (1989) also states that shamanistic practices were familiar to the early Russians. “Although they were devout adherents of the Orthodox Church, their folk beliefs had features in common with the Aleut world view. Sometimes they called on local shamans for aid when sick” (p. 47).

Oleksa and Mousalimas point out that many of the early clergy were from Irkutsk or other areas in Siberia, which were known to have practicing shamans. Mousalimas (2003) states that Veniaminov came from the region where the term shaman originated (p. 158). Oleksa agrees:

In the early days the missionaries from Russia did not come from Europe, they came from Siberia, and the Siberian peoples were intermarried with Siberian tribes. They weren’t “pure Russian,” they were mixed Siberian, Slavic, and Native people. And because of that they were familiar with shamans. So they had a more, I wouldn’t say a positive attitude toward shamans, but if they came out of Siberia they had an open mind. Some shamans were good; some shamans were bad. How did they use their powers, they took their healing and prophetic powers seriously either way, but how were they employing those powers. (M. J. Oleksa, personal communication, April 2013)

Therefore it seems at least during the early years of Orthodoxy, priests made determinations based on the specific shamanistic situation. However, there is evidence that the attitude changed as time progressed, and by the American era Orthodoxy was looking at shamanism as noncompatible with Orthodox beliefs. This will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter.

The Orthodox Church also brought changes in the dynamics of the relationships between indigenous groups:

Another change that occurred with the advent of Orthodoxy is that the Church encouraged a cessation of warfare between indigenous groups. There had been retaliatory wars between tribal groups and the Church spoke against that. There was less feuding and fights between shamans. People would blame the shaman in another village for a death in their own village and that then led to retaliation. The Church had a role in stopping some of that. (R. L. Collins, personal communication, May 2013)

Father Michael Oleksa described a specific example of Orthodoxy's effect on intertribal relations on the Yukon River:

One instance of this change in intertribal relations came as early as the 1850s where Netsvetov is taken to the Shageluk region where hundreds of Athabascans had gathered to hear him preach. He spoke for four days telling bible stories and after those four days they all requested to be baptized without any further discussion. So he spent the next three days baptizing all these hundreds of people. At the end of seven days with these Athabascan people, he said that these were people of different tribes, former enemies who had been fighting each other, feuding with each other, in the interior for generations, and his main task in evangelizing them was to bring an end to the intertribal warfare. (Oleksa, 1992, pp. 27-231; M. J. Oleksa, personal communication, April 2013)

The Orthodox Church started to gain a foothold in the region as early as 1819 when Kolmakov performed baptisms near Alexandrovskiy Redoubt, and by 1842 a chapel at Kolmakovskiy Redoubt was established, followed by the Kwikpak (Kvikhpak) mission on the Yukon at Ikogmiut (near present-day Russian Mission). Father Netsvetov, who was transferred there in 1845, and Father Illarion, arriving in 1862, served this station. Both priests traveled along the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers (Fortune, 1992, pp. 114-120).

Travel and missionary efforts by Russian Orthodox priests were infrequent and often combined with trading expeditions. The sporadic Russian Orthodox

priests' visits often focused on baptizing groups of people with little enforcement of Christian beliefs.

It is doubtful that the Russian form of Christianity ever made its full impact upon the old manner of living, for no sooner had the innovations been introduced than the priests begin to ignore the area and appeared so infrequently that very little understanding of the new could be realized. (Oswalt, 1963, p. 16)

The death of Father Iuvenalii also had an affect on missionizing efforts. "Further Christian missionary work among the remaining, much more numerous, (unbaptized) Americans was almost completely abandoned after Father Iuvenalii's martyr-like death, that is from 1796 to 1829" (Nichols and Croskey, 1972, p. 45). Until 1816 there was also only a single priest in the very large region with churches spread apart at great distances.

The initial sporadic missionizing efforts of the Orthodox Church changed in later years. From the writings of Moravian missionaries who came in the 1880s, it is clear that these missionaries felt a great disparity between their ideals and their new environment. Yup'ik housing, housekeeping, child rearing, and beliefs were completely foreign to the Moravians, and were often viewed with disgust. They often felt that they were martyrs for the cause of Christianity (Oswalt, 1963, pp. 23-29). Again this is the subject of subsequent studies; suffice it to say that the missionaries after the Russian era and their actions had a very strong impact on the culture and beliefs of the region.

Slowly the Russian Orthodox religion was accepted, in large part because of the local Native involvement in the ceremonies. It was also significant that the Orthodox Church did not discourage the use of the local Native language. In some cases laymen built formal chapels, long before the first missionary arrived, which were maintained long after the Russians left Alaska. Orthodoxy is not dependent on the actual presence of a priest, except for the performance of communion, marriage,

and baptisms. In the absence of priests, laymen performed baptisms and prayer services, and common-law marriages were recognized by RAC as legal. Russians, Creoles, and Alaska Natives, who considered themselves Orthodox Christians,

All displayed the material symbols of Orthodoxy: body crosses, icons, and prayer books, which they carried with them. Since the Orthodox services are sung and chanted, and there is much motion during the service, it probably struck a responsive chord among the Yup'ik. (Black, 1984, p. 33)

One of my interviewees pointed out that the early Russian priests were taught that they should be culturally sensitive:

#18: But the Russian priests. . . . The Russian priests were told that they are going, when they are traveling, they are told that they are guests to the communities and not to be, not to try to overrun them or over rule them in any way. Be as guests of the people, not to force them to turn away from their own language or their own culture.

Additionally, the Orthodox Church was compatible with many traditional beliefs. The Church melded traditional belief with Orthodoxy because you could still maintain respectful relationships with the animals, treating them with respect and such things as sharing your first salmon or first moose kill or how you trapped. A lot of the traditional things went on that depended on your relationship with the animals, so you still treated the animals respectfully. Some of that continued with the Orthodox. They didn't see a conflict with that in the Orthodox Church (R. L. Collins, personal communication, May 2013).

Gradually, of course, Christianity became well established in the middle Kuskokwim region. Today the two main religions are Catholic and Russian Orthodox. Russian Orthodox is the most common religion in the area and is considered by many as primarily a "Native" religion that has blended Yup'ik and Russian traditions and beliefs.

Changes in Leadership and Social Structure

In the middle Kuskokwim region, the presence of Russian explorers, traders and clergy brought about many cultural changes. In the early days of contact, changes started to occur in leadership and social structure. At the time of Russian contact, village leadership was dependent on the situation. During many times of the year, in the middle Kuskokwim, individual families were out on their own at spring, summer, or fall camps and worked together as an extended family. In the winter, people gathered in larger community groups.

Traditionally there were not really any appointed chiefs. "Leaders arose but their importance normally was related directly to their success in fulfilling valued expectations of their society" (Townsend, 1979, p. 162). Leadership was structured around elders, those well known for their hunting ability: the *nukalpiaq* (great hunters), or the *angalkuq* (shaman). Extended families looked to their elders for guidance.

At the time of historic contact no single individual could begin to represent a village except for certain ceremonial occasions. However, there was a semblance of village leadership in the hands of a good trapper and fisherman who was a forceful speaker and had a large extended family from whom he could draw support. (Oswalt, 1961, p. 82)

For spiritual and physical healing, people looked to the *angalkuq*.

The social and leadership structure changed with the arrival of the Russians. When the Russians entered an area, they appointed village chiefs as trading or church leaders. The early Russian Orthodox priests often appointed an influential villager to represent the church when the priest was not present (Oswalt, 1961, p. 80). It is difficult to say to what extent these Russian-appointed leaders were traditional leaders, but in some cases local Natives took an active role in selecting these leaders and their influence was reinforced (Znamenski, 1996, p. 34). "The church leaders who were appointed may have been traditional Native leaders, but

now they became first chief and second chief recognized by the church and they served in those positions for a lifetime, so it gave new status to the leader” (R. L. Collins, personal communication, May 2013).

In the early writings of the traveling priests, reference is often made to a description from the local church leader indicating who had been baptized and who still needed to be converted. The position of church leader or church chief still exists today in our mostly Russian Orthodox villages in the middle Kuskokwim. Originally the appointed church leader’s duties only involved the church, but Oswalt (1961) points out that in recent times in some villages, this position has also taken on secular authority, in addition to church duties (p. 80).

Another change in the social structure was the use of local people as trading contacts who could report on what furs were available and what trade goods people desired. Lieutenant Lavrentiy Zagoskin, who conducted the first ethnographic and geographic investigation of the Yukon and Kuskokwim valleys from 1842-1844, described the appointment of village leaders.

While Kolmakov was helping the newly established post (at the Holitna-Kuskokwim river junction) with transportation of provisions and of purchased furs, he was able to explore the Kuskokwim upstream for a hundred odd miles. He made contacts with Natives in that area and awarded one of them a medal and the rank of *nabolshiy* (chief). He also explored the lower reaches of the river, where he appointed men with the title of *toyon*, *zakzhik*, and *desyatskiy* (village headmen and their assistants responsible to the Company). (Michael, 1967, p. 80)

In a footnote, the medals are described as follows:

The medals which the Russian American Company still awards the American Natives are silver ones. They have a two-headed eagle on one side with the monogram of his Imperial Majesty Alexander the Blessed in the center, dated

1821. On the obverse in raised letters are the words: "Allies of Russia."
(Michael, 1967, p. 284)

The Russians bestowed titles and rank on the chiefs or "big men." This technique was one of the most efficient for the Russians as it minimized the coercion required to divert the Alaska Natives from their traditional hunting and gathering activities. The chiefs and big men would send their own men out to gather the furs (Pierce, 1988, p. 119).

Znamenski (1996) points out that during the fur trade years the traditional Tanaina (Dena'ina) leadership increased their influence and prestige when they acted as middlemen between European traders and the northern Athapaskan groups (p. 28). A strategically placed Russian post needed only to attract and cultivate a few of the better-connected local Natives to tap into that network and extend its trade into distant regions no Russian had ever seen. Also, direct access to the goods sold at a post allowed a Native to expand his trade ties and those of the Russians, far beyond traditional boundaries. This increased the Native trader's own wealth and prestige. A Native trader who became too powerful in his middleman role could also hinder Russian trade, but the trading was often mutually beneficial and became common in the interior trade (Arndt, 1990, p. 95).

Another possible consequence of the increased opportunity for trade was to create new and intensified opportunities for trade and competition for young males. This changed the nature of indigenous warfare where trade opportunities, control of the trade, and the availability of new trade goods impacted conflicts. Western goods and weaponry, changing the nature of warfare in the subarctic, may have augmented status and prestige (Reedy-Maschner and Maschner, 1999).

This change in social and leadership structure with the appointment of church and trading chiefs diverted power away from the local *angalkuq* and *nukalpiaq*. Thus the leadership and power shifted away from control of the local people.

The introduction of the Orthodox Church also affected social structure. Those new converts were given church names as baptismal names, which were one name the first generation and then in succeeding generations became the family name. The church also became the center of activities during Easter and Christmas and people would cease their trapping and come together in the village for the celebrations. So the church year began to influence traditional seasonal movements. Orthodoxy changed marriage patterns as marriages were recognized and celebrated in the church. Priests may have also been involved in helping to find brides. Marriage links expanded trading partnerships as well as travel patterns as traders then had family and Orthodox links in other regions (R. L. Collins, personal communication, May 2013).

The Russian Church introduced schooling, instructing students in both Russian and Native language. "In addition to the church-established schools, Kolmakov and Lukin are known to have maintained schools at their respective redoubts in which they themselves are teachers" (Black, 1984, p. 36).

Changes in Values and Attitudes

Many of the traditional cultural values and attitudes of the people of the middle Kuskokwim region were not in conflict with the teachings of the Orthodox Church. Indigenous lifestyles relied upon strong family and extended family units for fishing, hunting and gathering, and the sharing of food in times of need. Passing along traditional knowledge and skills were vital for survival, ancestors were remembered and honored, elders were respected, hard work and honesty were valued, and spirituality was important.

The Russians found some compatibility between indigenous values and Christian values:

Although their patience is not a Christian virtue—for they are born patient—it, along with their custom of helping one another in time of need, nourishes Christian virtue in them. These are superb traits for building true Christians.

The raw material is ideal; only workers and funds are needed. (Nichols and Croskey, 1972, p. 52)

The traditional value of honoring deceased relatives is still carried on in the Selaviq celebration, where it is believed the deceased relatives join in the feast. Before the prayers and singing, the table is set with the feast and a spoonful of each food is placed in a cup or bowl. That remains on the table during the prayers, singing, and sprinkling of holy water. Later the bowl of food is burned so that departed loved ones can also partake in the feast. Similarly, an offering of food is also always thrown in a campfire.

A family that has lost a mother, a father, an aunt, an uncle, a grandparent in the previous year at Christmas will have a bigger feast and distribute gifts in memory of the person who died in the previous year. That doesn't happen anywhere else in Alaska except the middle Kuskokwim. (M. J. Oleksa, personal communication, April 2013)

As stated previously, prior to the arrival of the Russians, raids were common between indigenous groups. The Church spoke out against the retaliatory wars between tribal groups:

They were just happy people weren't killing each other anymore and that was in a certain sense a qualitative leap forward because when he [Netsvetov] preaches to those Athabascans about the need for peaceful, respectful, nonviolent relationships with people of all tribes and because they are Christians they are not allowed to kill each other anymore. That's a huge transformation in their consciousness of what it means to be a human being. And you see that's really what Netsvetov in particular had to preach about because there was lots of inter-tribal violence. Because if you are the real people and these people are not, then they are not really human. They're good for slave labor and otherwise if there are too many of them then you

gotta protect yourself. . . . So just to get people to accept other tribes as legitimately human, and now that they are all baptized your brothers and sisters is probably the most important initial step to be taken. (M. J. Oleksa, personal communication, April 2013)

Perhaps the most blatant conflict between Russian and indigenous values is reflected in the godfather relationship established especially early on during the Russian era. This was briefly discussed above. The Russian godparent's feelings of responsibility for the spiritual and educational needs of their godchildren and the subsequent hostage taking were in direct conflict with the importance of family and love of children. The Russians probably thought that a proper Russian education would be beneficial to the Native children, with little regard for the fact that they were separating children from their family and home.

The relatively short Russian era, from first contact in the 1790s to the sale of Alaska in 1867, was the beginning of Western influence in the middle Kuskokwim region and the cultural blending that is still evident today. Russian explorers, traders and clergy, who forever altered the indigenous population through trade, religion, disease, leadership, and social structure, represented the dichotomy between the indigenous and the Western world perspectives. Some of the changes, such as trade items, were easily melded into the traditional lifestyle. Other changes, in social structure were adapted over time. But one change, the devastation caused by disease, severely damaged the cultural core of the region.

Effect of Disease and Continuation of Epidemics into the 20th Century

The initial resistance to the Russian Orthodox religion was due not only to the fact that Russian Orthodox priests wanted shamans to give up their shamanistic practices before they could be baptized, but also the belief that the smallpox epidemic of 1835-1840 was brought by the Russians (Oswalt, 1960, p. 114).

When indigenous peoples are first contacted by the outside world, they become exposed to Western diseases for the first time. The arrival of Russians and later Americans brought a host of epidemics of diseases for which the indigenous people had no resistance, including smallpox, influenza, tuberculosis, and STDs. The powers of their shamans and their traditional healers had no effect over these new diseases (Napoleon, 1996, pp. 8-9).

A series of illnesses swept the Kuskokwim region. The smallpox epidemic from 1835-1840 affected the entire state and is one of the most significant events in Alaska Native history. After that, almost annual epidemics followed.

In 1838 the smallpox epidemic reached the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. In 1844 “catarrhal fever” respiratory disease was recorded at Kolmakovskiy Redoubt. In 1848 a winter camp near Ikogmiut (Russian Mission) had symptoms of whooping cough. From the 1840s through the 1860s nearly every spring respiratory diseases and influenza arrived in epidemic force in the riverine communities. Many times the diseases arrived with ships that docked on the western coast and quickly spread throughout northern and western Alaska. In the later 1800s, infectious disease outbreaks were increasingly severe as prospectors, traders, and missionaries inundated the coasts and rivers. Diseases included diphtheria, measles, scarlet fever, mumps, typhoid, pneumonia, influenza, and smallpox (Fortune, 1992, pp. 209-215, 230).

Netsvetov’s journal (Pierce, 1984) contains almost annual mention of sickness affecting people’s attendance at services. In January 1852, when he visited Kolmakovskiy Redoubt and the Native settlement of Kwigimpainagmiut located across and slightly upriver from the redoubt, he was told that many of the inhabitants stayed away for the winter in places where the last year’s epidemic caught them during the summer (p. 285). In November 1859, Netsvetov received a report from Kolmakovskiy that all along the Kuskokwim there was a coughing epidemic that was even more widespread than was occurring on the Yukon River.

Many had died, even in the redoubt itself, especially young children. In addition there was an extreme scarcity of food along the whole river (p. 396).

The only known instance of aggression against the Russians in the middle Kuskokwim region followed the smallpox epidemic of 1838-1839. Kuskokwim Eskimos became bitter toward the Russians, whom they thought had purposefully introduced the disease. These Eskimos killed the Russian American Company employees at the Russian *odinochka* of Ikogmiut along the Yukon River and planned an attack on Lukin's station on the Kuskokwim. Probably because of Lukin's good relationship with the local population, he was warned, and when the would-be attackers entered his cabin, Lukin threw the leader out the window, after which the rest immediately took off. This encounter may have been exaggerated, since other accounts state that "Lukin simply met the leader of the raiding party man-to-man and bested him" (Pierce, 1984, p. 470). Regardless of the details, this is the only known example of Eskimo aggression against the Russians along the river (Michael, 1967, p. 255; Oswalt, 1980a, p. 52; Pierce, 1984, p. 470).

In the Nushagak and Kuskokwim drainages, the diseases killed many of the Native leaders with whom the RAC had established strong trade relations. By 1840, the smallpox epidemic had ended but its effects on the interior trade lingered. Most of the Natives were too busy rebuilding their lives to participate in the fur trade. Others had become extremely wary of any unnecessary contact with strangers, Native or Russians. And others blamed the epidemic on the Russians and wanted retaliation. In an effort to revive the trade, the company sent out emissaries to convince the Native inhabitants of the Russians' innocence in the epidemic and of their continued goodwill toward Native peoples. In the interim, company personnel temporarily increased their own hunting efforts to keep up the fur production (Arndt, 1990, p. 100).

After the devastating smallpox epidemic, many lost confidence in the ability of their shamans, and religious beliefs became more susceptible to the efforts of the missionaries. For some a strong tradition of self-reliance was replaced by

dependency on relatives and the Russian trading posts. Elders and culture bearers perished along with their memories. With many traditional hunting grounds and villages being abandoned, the subsequent generation was unsure of themselves and their abilities (Fortune, 1992, p. 237).

As stated above, the smallpox epidemic of 1838 was the first of many epidemic diseases that struck western Alaska. Disease continued to impact the local population throughout the Russian era and long after. The influenza epidemics, including the “Great Death” of 1900, ravaged both the population and culture of the region. The epidemic killed whole families and wiped out villages. Many of the culture bearers and *angalkuq* died. In their minds they had been overcome with evil medicines on which medicine men were ineffective. Everything they had believed in had failed. The survivors’ world was without an anchor (Napoleon, 1996, pp. 9-13).

The year 1900 marked a major demographic change in the Kuskokwim region. The devastating Great Death epidemic of 1900 included both influenza and measles. The influenza epidemic that arrived that year with the supply vessels and the many miners who flooded into Nome reduced the Native population by half. Influenza combined with measles quickly spread. What is not often realized is that the major epidemics such as this one were especially difficult to treat because of the frequency of secondary complications such as pneumonia, gastrointestinal disorders, and tuberculosis, which increased the seriousness of the measles and influenza infections. The epidemic was probably spread from the Yukon to the Kuskokwim via the traditional portage from Russian Mission (Ikogmiut) to Kalskag. The epidemic spread quickly in the Yukon-Kuskokwim region as families fled infected villages. As the disease struck villages and summer camps almost everyone became sick, with few remaining to fish, gather firewood, or even bury the dead. The disease caused a social breakdown where people were too ill to give assistance or provide food or water. Normal subsistence activities were interrupted and so food supplies were depleted. In some cases missionaries helped where they could, but it was also noticed that often they were immune to the disease. Most affected

were winter villages on the Yukon and Kuskokwim, many of which were abandoned. Just as people were trying to recover from the 1900 epidemic, the 1918-1919 worldwide influenza pandemic struck Alaska again with devastating effects (Fienup-Riordan, 2000, p. 14; Fortuine, 1992, pp. 215-226; "Great Pandemic Alaska," 2013; Wolfe, 1982, pp. 94, 109-111).

CJ: Did anyone ever talk about any of the big sicknesses they had, smallpox or flu?

#20: My dad did. Well his sister died of TB and I had, my mom had some older kids but they were sickly with TB and pneumonia and his sister died of TB and she was in Mt. Edgecumbe those days and they couldn't even cure the thing, or any kind of cure. . . . My dad say that sickness was really bad, that's why when you go tundra, anywhere you see graveyards in the tundra.

Although little is written about the devastating effects of epidemics in Alaska Native history, some information comes from missionary accounts of the Orthodox priests Netsvetov, as mentioned above, and Illarion for the earlier epidemics, and for the 1900 influenza epidemic from the Moravian Romig and from the Catholic Mission in Holy Cross.

Although most of the Russian Orthodoxy expressed grave concern during this cycle of the early epidemics, Zagoskin (Michael, 1967) expressed a different Russian perspective when in the early 1840s he made reference to the aftermath of the smallpox epidemic: "The affliction sent them by Providence was great, but the blessing that resulted was likewise, as all those who are left are Christians" (p. 100). Even Veniaminov viewed the epidemic as providential. In referring to the savagery of the Koloshi (Tlingit) and their long-standing hatred of the Russians as being a barrier to Christianity, he states:

This barrier would long have remained impenetrable if Providence had not sent them a disease which they had apparently never before encountered. This disease, chicken pox [smallpox], put an end to the reign of rude ignorance

among the Koloshi, and their enlightenment then began. The disease, which raged in early 1836, was so severe during January and February that nearly half the population died. Yet while ravaging them, the disease also worked to their advantage. First, it mainly killed the old people who would not give up their ignorance, superstitions, and hatred of the Russians and all innovations. These people had a strong hold over the thoughts of most of the others, even those of the last generation born just before or soon after the Russians arrived. Second, the disease convinced the Koloshi both that vaccination was beneficial and that the Russians had a greater and more perfect knowledge. Third, because the disease completely changed their opinion of the Russians, it also shattered their faith in the shamans who, despite their guardian spirits, died together with those who sought their help. (Nichols and Croskey, 1972, p. 47)

In another letter written in 1836 Veniaminov mellowed a bit. "In a period of two months, this terrible visitor killed 300 Koloshi of those living near the fort. A terrible number!" (Nichols and Croskey, 1972, p. 47).

Population statistics of the time help show the devastation. Early population statistics are often questioned. The figures noted below come from Oswalt, who used the United States decimal censuses supplemented by other reliable estimates from contemporary observers (Oswalt, 1980a, pp. 17-18).

It is estimated that the population of the entire Kuskokwim river drainage in early historic times was about 4,000. By 1889 it was estimated at 2,743. The population continued to decline to 1,014 ten years later, and by turn of the century it was below 600, with the lowest recorded population at 514 from 1910 to 1919 (Fortune, 1992, pp. 215-226, 235; Oswalt, 1980a, pp. 17-18).

The Yup'ik people were forced to adapt after this devastation.

The effects of the smallpox epidemic of 1838-1839, combined with subsequent epidemics of influenza in 1852-1853 and 1861, produced a decline and a shift in the population and undercut interregional social

distinctions. Although the introduction of communicable disease damaged traditional social groups and patterns of intergroup relations, it left largely intact the routines of daily life throughout the remainder of the 19th century. Small bands of extended family groups continued to move over the landscape, seeking the animals they needed to support life and gathering in winter villages for an elaborate annual ceremonial round. (Fienup-Riordan, 2000, p. 10)

However, in some cases, social interactions were upset as families lost key members:

In terms of the women, the actual sicknesses and deaths seem to have led to a lot of stealing of brides because all of a sudden the man was without a wife and he had several children to support and no wife and so on. And if there was already bad feelings somewhere else, they would go over and they actually killed other individuals and took their wives home. There was a kidnapping of women and sometimes young children too because I've got stories up here about people escaping after being kidnapped on the Yukon and escaping and making their way back home. (R. L. Collins, personal communication, May 2013)

I was also told that they believed that some of the sickness was caused by shamanic activity in surrounding areas and this might lead to an attack in retaliation. Men seem to be the main target with women and children being spared. Some of these were then kidnapped. (R. L. Collins, personal communication, October 2013)

Collins' information on the increase in kidnapping after the epidemics is in opposition to Fienup-Riordan's research findings that the decrease in population meant an end to intertribal raids. Perhaps there were some differences between the

upriver Athabascan peoples and the downriver Yup'ik, or we could be talking about a difference in time frame.

Prior to the arrival of the Russians, intervillage relations and skirmishes sporadically interrupted delta life. Conflicts occurred because of personal vengeance, a desire for goods, the wish to capture women, or territorial expansion or trespass. The devastating epidemics and the drastic decline in the indigenous population brought an end to this killing. Although few Russians settled in southwestern Alaska, the larger Russian trade network to the south introduced smallpox into the region. The large number of deaths brought about the abandonment and disappearance of entire villages. As much as 60% of the Yup'ik population with whom the Russians were familiar in Bristol Bay and along the Kuskokwim was dead by 1838 (Fienup-Riordan, 1994, p. 30; Fienup-Riordan, 2000, p. 10; Townsend, 1979, pp. 166-167).

The Establishment of the Creole Class and Their Role as Cultural Brokers

In order to understand the role that Russian heritage plays in the middle Kuskokwim region, we must understand the establishment of the Creole class both during and after the Russian occupation of Alaska.

As stated previously, the Russian colonization was less severe in the middle Kuskokwim than in other parts of Alaska like the Aleutians or Kodiak area. This was due to several factors, including the distance to Russian stronghold centers, difficulty in transporting supplies and men, and the importance of establishing good relations with the local population in order to increase trading success. The changes brought by the Russians were also more easily incorporated into everyday life because local Native traders were an essential part of Russian trading success and especially since many of the early Russian traders married into the local population. It was their offspring, the Creoles that continued this trade. By the second

generation of Creoles, these offspring were considered to be a part of the local population.

Who Were the Creoles?

As stated previously, Creole is a European term, applied mostly by the Spanish in the New World. Most Creoles in Alaska were offspring of Russian men and Native women, but note that Creole was a term of social rather than racial status and could refer to others of any mixed ancestry. Creoles in Russian America had the same status as members of the Russian burgher (merchant townsmen), and were considered Russian subjects. In the nineteenth century, Creoles in Alaska were established as a privileged class, a status that was demonstrated in their actions and contributions. They had exemption from taxation and obligatory state service and a right to education at Russian American Company expense. It is also interesting to note that the Russian American Company encouraged unions between Russians and local Native women because it improved the chances of retaining the Russian workforce in America (Black, 1990, p. 147; Vinkovetsky, 2010, p. 5).

Creoles of mixed ancestry were often classified with the Russians, other times with Alaska Natives. To complicate matters, after 1821, all Alaska Natives who pledged their political allegiance to the tsar became “naturalized citizens” and were considered Creoles. Other Creoles who were Native but considered “townsmen” were Creoles by virtue of their residence in one of the major settlements and were often thought of as “only Natives.” So Creoles included two groups, Alaska Natives and those of mixed Slavic/Siberian/Alaska Native parentage or ancestry. Oleksa states:

Often ridiculed by both Slavs and indigenous Americans, the Creoles were caught in the middle between two worlds. But their creative response to the social and racial status resulted in many Creoles playing an important role in the exploration, mapping, economic and commercial development, evangelization, and later acculturation of Alaska. . . . Creoles combined

elements of two cultures, often spoke two languages, and later could read and write two or more, but were not necessarily biologically “mixed.” To be Creole was more a matter of the spirit, a state of mind, a question of self-identity. (Oleksa, 1990, p. 185)

Creoles adopted Slavic-European attitudes and traits, had been trained to some extent in a Western-type school, and qualified for a position in the middle or upper management of the colony. Creoles were not necessarily of mixed racial stock and did not necessarily abandon much of their heritage as Alaska Natives. Despite being sometimes scorned, for the most part they thought of themselves as having the best of two worlds, rather than as being victims caught between them (Oleksa, 1990, p. 188).

As stated above, under the Russians, the term Creole (or the term “colonial citizen”) was not a racial category. Both designated social status. For the Russians, social status was inherited through the father’s side, so the Creole status became acknowledged usually in the paternal line. This became even more complicated for second-generation Creoles. The children of a Creole woman who married a Native man were almost always considered to be members of the Native father’s group. Children of a male Creole marrying a Native woman, however, retained their father’s Creole status. By classifying the mixed population of Russian America with a specific term, both privilege (as compared to Natives) and lower status (as compared to Russians) was established. The Creole status only existed in Alaska, and by 1863, near the end of the Russian period, the number of Creoles in RAC service had grown to almost 2,000. Their role in managing the colony was very important; they served as managers of remote outposts and were teachers, clergy, navigators, cartographers, ship commanders, and artists (Black, 2004, p. 217; Schweitzer, Golovko and Vakhtin, 2013, p. 434).

Because of the privileges Creoles enjoyed and because of the positions of responsibility and leadership many occupied in the colony, the Russians of the lower

classes who were denied educational opportunities and were far less socially mobile sometimes resented them. Some Creoles also showed pride in their status and achievements, which sometimes created resentment directed at the “upstarts” on the part of higher ranking visitors to the colony, who considered them arrogant and pretentious (Black, 2004, p. 218). Some government officials felt that the Creole privileges were not justified:

Kostlivtsev officially suggested that the majority of the Creoles should be encouraged to live the lifestyle of Native Alaskans, to maintain Native skills and crafts. He proposed that the Creole estate be abolished and the individuals hitherto designated as Creoles either join the Native communities or, as would be their right through their fathers, assume membership in the estates of metropolitan Russia. Children born out of wedlock, Kostlivtsev suggested, would be ascribed to the estate of their mother. (Black, 2004, p. 218)

It is also interesting that the influential Creole status was limited to men. Women in the Russian Empire were usually entirely dependent on their men: father, husband, or other male relative. Creole women were mostly housewives. Only some of them were employed by the RAC as midwives, cooks, and caretakers at schools for girls, with low salary and low social status. A Creole woman had only one way to raise her status, by marrying a naval officer or a RAC official (Grinev, 2010, p. 2).

Creoles as Cultural Brokers

The concept of cultural broker was first used in the field of anthropology in the mid 1900s in referring to Native people whose role was as a cultural intermediary or cultural broker with the Western society. A cultural broker is a person who bridges, links, or mediates between groups or persons of differing cultural backgrounds for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change. Usually the cultural broker is from one or other of the cultures but could be from a

third group. Often they are capable of mediating in both directions. The role covers more than being an interpreter, although this is important in cross-cultural situations where there are language differences. Cultural brokers emerged as differing cultures came in contact. Cultural brokers served as intermediaries, bridging the gap between divergent groups (“Cultural Broker,” 2012).

In Russian America, especially in the middle Kuskokwim region, most Creoles, especially first and even second-generation Creoles, played the role of cultural broker. Szasz (1994) points out that cultural brokers were intermediaries who became repositories of two or more cultures; they changed roles at will, in accordance with circumstances. They knew how the “other side” thought and behaved, and they responded accordingly. Their grasp of different perspectives led all sides to value them. They were intermediaries molded by their own personal circumstances and the cultures that nurtured them. They were also shaped by the historical conditions that affected societies and individuals during their lifetimes (pp. 6, 20).

The Russian-Native offspring were in a sense born into their role as cultural brokers. They grew up between two civilizations and could and did function between the two cultures. Not only were their dual language skills needed, but they also possessed the knowledge of protocol and ritual and had intimate familiarity with both the Russian and Native cultural perceptions and expectations.

Russian and Alaska Native interaction was not a replacement of one culture with another, nor just cultural blending. The RAC had clear expectations towards Creoles, which included speaking both Russian and the local Native language, to be Russian Orthodox, and to work for the RAC (DeHass, 2009, p. 56).

The RAC personnel at all trading posts were of mixed composition, ethnic Russians often being in the minority. Moreover, Russians did not always occupy command positions, and on exploring expeditions or on outlying posts, Russians were subordinate to Creoles. Intermarriage occurred frequently. Long-term residence and marriage alliances meant that RAC personnel had friendship and

kinship ties with Native men who often became their trading partners and eventually official middlemen in the RAC-Native trade. Also when a post manager died, the RAC tended to give preferential appointment to one of his sons, usually the oldest son. Petr Kolmakov and Ivan Lukin were two Creole sons who took over their father's trading duties. Ivan was three-quarters Native, but in Russian terms, a Creole like his father. Such men had even closer links to Native communities than their fathers. They grew up in a Yup'ik environment, spoke more than one Native language, and were thoroughly at home in the Native world. They lived by Native customs in local conditions, wore Native clothing, ate Native foods, and worked with Native tools and weapons with great skill. These Russians were not at all strangers in the Native society and today, their descendants are Natives (Black, 1984, p. 32).

Creoles not only served as cultural brokers with trade but also as spiritual intermediaries with the Russian Orthodox Church. It was Creole missionaries who "brought literacy and Christianity to their own and to neighboring tribes, developing writing systems and undertaking the work of translation into heretofore unwritten languages. They founded schools and produced the textbooks" (Oleksa, 1990, p. 188). Creoles also served as cultural brokers between the various tribes, keeping the peace and bridging hostilities often brought on by trade.

Farmen (2011) stated that the RAC sought to create a class of native-born citizens with loyalties to both Alaska land and life and to Russian cultural values. He states that what comes across more than anything in the narratives of the Creole people is that they were supremely suited for the business of hunting, trapping, and exploration across Alaska. The Russian side of their heritage gave them an appreciation for the benefits of literacy and commerce and the material comforts these could bring to their lives. At the same time, the Native side of their heritage gave them the essential skills for survival in remote Alaska:

Russian Alaska may have been born from pillage, rape and destruction, but what those earliest years gave rise to was a class of citizens who were supremely competent in the land unto which they were born, to say nothing

of a colonial society where European and Native Alaskan blended together to become far more together than the mere sum of their parts. (Farmen, 2011, p. 3)

Another instance of the Creoles as a class above local Natives is seen by the separation of residences at Russian redoubts. An example of this in the middle Kuskokwim region was the presence of Creoles at Kolmakovskiy Redoubt. Zagoskin's and Illarion's descriptions as well as archaeological work at the site indicates that the manager lived in a small room attached to the Creole barracks, with a separate structure for Eskimo employees and their families (Oswalt, 1980b, p. 19). Zagoskin also stated that Creoles, as RAC employees, had the right to flour rations (Michael, 1967, p. 207-208).

It is clear that the Russian American Company had to rely on Creoles because of the lack of a work force in the Alaska colony. But not everyone agrees that the Creoles held a privileged status. Although some Creoles were in professional or craftsmen professions, most were low-level workers. Grinev (2010) notes this low-level status and also goes on to say that most of the Creoles were lazy, abused alcohol, and died at a young age due to poor health. These low-class Creoles also had debts owed to the RAC, which hindered improvement of their economic condition (pp. 4-5). Grinev disagrees with some researchers that Creoles possessed privileged positions in the Russian colonies in America. As proof he notes that few ever gained high-level positions (p. 7). From looking at Grinev's analysis, it seems that he is comparing Creoles with high-level Russians, rather than making the status comparison with that of local Natives of the time.

Changes in Creole Individuality and Power After the Sale of Alaska

The Creoles as cultural brokers were necessary for Russian success. Their sense of identity and belonging, unique situation and skills, plus personal motives

and ambitions often meant a career that included material and monetary rewards and prestige. But later, after the sale of Alaska, their official status changed when Russia “abandoned” them.

After 1867, the majority of the “Russian” population in Alaska consisted of Creoles. With the sale of Russian America and the departure of the Russians from North America, the Creoles were left behind. Creoles, as well as the Russians, were offered passage to Russia, but many had ties to Alaska and chose to stay.

The arrival of the Americans was a difficult time for the people who had become literate, culturally unique, and a part of the Russian culture. Lain (1976) states that the purchase of Alaska had a shattering effect on the Russian-speaking population, with the disappearance and collapse of most remnants of the Russian society resulting in a state of social instability. Before the purchase, the RAC had a paternalistic policy and enforced military discipline, setting the social norms in the colony. After the Russians left, so did the structure that so many people had become accustomed to, especially in the more urban centers (pp. 147-149). That change in bureaucratic structure probably didn’t affect the middle Kuskokwim as drastically as it was felt in such areas as Sitka and Kodiak. In more remote parts of Alaska the Russian influence was less dependent on governmental structure and more dependent on individual actions.

The Creole presence undermined American assumptions about naturally separate races. Demoralized and destitute, they were the subject of contempt as half-breeds, a category that placed them above the local Native population but lower than white residents. Only a handful of Creoles integrated into the new Euro-American society (Black, 2004, p. 218; Kan, 2010, p. 2). The Americans did not recognize the distinct cultural differences between the Creoles and the Alaska Natives, and they were reabsorbed in the Alaska Native population. To the Americans, Creoles and their Russian culture were to be eradicated.

The Russians did not have any qualms about granting persons of mixed ancestry full rights as natural-born citizens, but the Americans did:

The scientific consensus of the day was that persons of mixed blood were inferior, both physically and mentally, to persons of either pure white or pure Native descent. Manifest Destiny had no room for people with brown skin and black hair. So the Americans officially shoved the Creoles aside and made them second-class non-citizens here in their own country, a situation that would not be corrected until the 1920s. (Farmen, 2011, p. 4)

Also, as was shown by the aforementioned case of John Mynook, the Treaty of Cession distinguished between the rights of those of Russian ancestry and the “uncivilized tribes.” Russians were given the rights and advantages of citizens of the United States. The uncivilized tribes were subject to laws and regulations of the other aboriginal tribes of the United States, without any rights of citizenship (Schneider, 1986, pp. 161-163).

Another radical transformation took place with the sale of Alaska. The Creoles were displaced from their positions within the Russian American Company. Other forms of natural resource exploitation concentrated on fisheries and resource extraction. Within this framework there were few jobs for the Alaska Natives or Creoles. Trading activities were taken over by American companies, and more independent traders came into the area, resulting in more competition for furs.

Euroamericans began fur trapping in the central Kuskokwim area in the early 1900s concurrent with a rise in fur prices. Between 1907 and 1909 the number of non-Native fur trappers and prospectors along the Kuskokwim rose from 12 to 200. In 1917 Kolmakovskiy Redoubt was abandoned as the result of a decline in fur prices brought on by World War I and widespread epidemics and disease along the Kuskokwim. (Charnley, 1984, p. 25)

Creoles became marginalized with the sale of Alaska. They lost their sense of importance and relevance. Creoles were described as morally corrupt and unfit by several influential surveyors of the time. “After the sale of Alaska, the creoles

became disenfranchised. Perhaps, of all peoples of all sorts and conditions the Americans found in Alaska in 1867, none suffered such degradation as the Creoles” (Black, 2004, p. 218). They were labeled “half-breeds,” beginning with William H. Dall’s influential *Alaska and Its Resources*, first published in 1870. They were considered a “mixed race,” and as such were viewed as totally depraved. Dall wrote: “In their present condition the Creoles are unfit to exercise franchise, as American citizens” (Black, 2004, p. 218).

In an 1880 *New York Times* news article, “Alaska and Its People,” Creoles are described as lazy, immoral, and diseased. The article was based on a report written by Captain George W. Bailey that was published by the U.S. Treasury department.

The Creoles seem to Captain Bailey to have lost all ambition; they cannot be induced to work or to catch fish for others. They catch fish only when they are hungry, and upon these and a few potatoes they barely live from year to year. . . . Among the Indians chronic venereal affections are very common, the result of intercourse with Russian sailors and migratory miners and the utter abandonment of the principles of morality. (*“Alaska and Its People,”* 1880)

The discrimination against people of mixed races included not only the Creoles, but also others of mixed Native/European heritage. Annette Freiburger in her M.A. thesis on the life history of her mother Effie Kokrine, states that her mother described her father (born in 1890), as a half-breed who was expected to marry another half-breed. Her mother, Effie, was born in 1919, and this view also carried over into her mother’s generation.

Half-breeds did not fit in well in either the white or Native culture. They were looked down upon, according to Effie’s notes, and did not really belong in either the town or the village. . . . When my father got big he was labeled a “half-breed.” In those days, the half-breeds were not very welcome. They were looked down upon, and so they didn’t fit in with the Native people and they did not fit in with the white people. They were considered, just like you

would treat a complete orphan. My mother was also a half-breed, and when my father got in his twenties, they were starting to look for a wife for him... My mother was a half-breed, and my father was a half-breed. They gave these two half-breeds to each other because they didn't really fit in no place, in respect of the town, but they were good enough to be like the servant around the house. (Freiburger, 2013, pp. 43, 55-56)

According to Partnow (2001), "the status of creoles plummeted from favored children to invisible savages" following the takeover of Alaska by the United States (p. 144). In efforts to defend themselves against the discrimination and marginalization that came with the term "half-breed" or "mixed blood," many Creoles began identifying themselves as "Russian" (p. 143).

However, even after the sale, some Russian-mixed residents preferred the designation of Creole rather than Native. In 1916, Margaret Wood, an American schoolteacher in Kodiak, lost her job after referring to the local population as Native or half-breed. She also characterized the difference in the attitudes between Russians and Americans toward relationships with Natives and the competition for the Creole young women. She then supposed that the Creole men might have to reach out to more outlying communities where Native blood is greater than in Kodiak, thus resulting in "racial diffusion" (Wood, 1943, p. 204-208).

More recently, Pullar (2010) describes the legacy that Creoles and their descendants left behind. He stated that among all the successful Creoles and descendants of Creoles from Woody Island, it is doubtful that very many were aware they were Creoles or even knew what a Creole was. Creoles *expected* to be successful and were. Initially their Creole status contributed to their successes, but later success came from the traits of hard work, adaptability, and determination that had been handed down to them over the generations (pp. 17-18).

The American view of white society defining civilization of the indigenous population of Alaska can also be seen in the afore mentioned case of John Mynook

who had to fight for the rights of citizenship that were supposedly granted to him by the Treaty of Cession. This is discussed in chapter 1.

Changes in Religion and Education After the Sale of Alaska

With the “Americanization” of Alaska, changes also took place in the religious and education realms. The changes can be seen in the missionizing and educational approaches of two men: Father John Veniaminov, a Russian priest who served Alaska from 1824 to 1850, and Presbyterian minister Sheldon Jackson, who served as the superintendent of public instruction in Alaska from 1884-1909. Their differing approaches to religion and culture illustrate the far-reaching changes that occurred after the sale of Alaska. The Russians placed tremendous value on education and Native language literacy in their missionary efforts. Individual language and culture were respected. Instruction and church services were conducted not only in Russian but also in the local Native language, with Aleut and Tlingit translations of church songs and text. Sheldon Jackson’s goals included educating and converting the Natives, avoiding the Lower 48 reservation system, protecting Natives against white exploitation, and controlling the manufacture and sale of liquor. His mission schools would serve as Protestant forts to protect the Natives. Jackson believed that religion was inseparably linked to culture, especially the American culture of his time (Dauenhauer, 1990, pp. 155-163; Dauenhauer, 1997, pp. 5-19).

The two missionary approaches represented by Veniaminov and Jackson serve as a barometer of the change that occurred after 1867. In Russian America a person did not have to abandon or change his or her culture or language to become a Christian. Sheldon Jackson brought in the prevailing view that linked Christianity and American language and culture, where English only was the acculturation connection between Christianity and the American civilization (Dauenhauer, 1997, pp. 5-19).

In the mid 1880s, Sheldon Jackson met with Protestant leaders to “divide Alaska into a pie of sorts” (Williams, 2009, p. 153) to focus missionary efforts and avoid competition. The Comity Plan gave different regions of Alaska to the Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Baptists, Methodists, Moravians, and even the Congregationalists. Protestant missionaries did what they could to eradicate the presence of Orthodoxy. Efforts were made to remove any trace of the Russian language and Russian Orthodox religion. Although guarantees were written into the Treaty of Cession for religious rights, the American Protestant missionaries objected to the presence and competition from the Orthodox Church.

Orthodox clergy visits to the Kuskokwim were infrequent for a decade or more: “After the sale of Alaska, the imperial Russian government, which had been represented by the Russian American Company, withdrew a large part of its support, and the missions suffered neglect” (Shalkop, 1977, p. 132).

The impact of the sale of Alaska on Creole members of the clergy was traumatic. They had accepted Russian religious and political beliefs, were dependent economically on the Russian American Company, and had learned to think of themselves as Russians. With the transfer of land to the new owner, they were left to face a new world on their own. (Shalkop, 1987, p. 217)

The neglect was evidenced by the travel journal of Vasilii Orlov, a Creole who was sent to investigate the possibility of reestablishing a mission at the Kolmakovskiy Redoubt in the winter of 1885-1886. While traveling from the Nushagak mission to the Kuskokwim he reported on the lack of missionizing in this area.

In these 13 villages, from the boundary of the Nushagak Mission to the estuary of the river Kuskokwim, live the coastal idol-worshipping Kuskokwim people; all of them are settled and peaceful but very uncivilized. They have never heard anything from anyone about the true God, as they admit themselves. There are about 37 souls among them who had been baptized a long time ago by different laymen when the RAC was there. They say that they do not know what they

were baptized for; they do not know at all their own names, except for three: Ioann, Stephan, and Irina. They have no idea how to make the sign of the Cross and, most important, not all of them have been anointed. (Shalkop, 1977, p. 135)

It should be noted that although missions may have suffered neglect, both Oleksa and Collins state that on the local level Orthodoxy carried on quite well with local village church leaders and local Native priests. The local people kept Orthodoxy going and made it even more village based. This is discussed at greater length in chapters 5 and 6.

After the chapel at Kolmakovskiy was closed, it wasn't until the 1890s before an Orthodox church was established in the middle Kuskokwim region. In the early 1890s the establishment of a new mission parish was authorized, from the old Kvikhpak mission area, to cover the Kuskokwim region. It was based at a village called Pavlovsk, today called Chuathbaluk, formerly called Little Russian Mission. A priest and reader were assigned in 1894 and other chapels were constructed along the Kuskokwim. Construction of a new church began in 1897, and the church consecrated in 1905 (Smith, 1980, pp. 31-34).

#14: If you go to Chuathbaluk, there's a little fence with a cross in the center, right behind, you walk up the road, right before the church on the left side, that's where the first church was. Probably 100 years ago, 120 years ago. . . . I want to say Uppa¹¹ Sam built that one, cause they burn this one. This one down here was so old and they put a cross and a fence as a memorial. And that one that's there. He [Uppa Sam Phillips] and my dad [and others], I think all of his sons too helped to build that church that is there now.

¹¹ Uppa is the commonly used term for grandfather in southwestern Alaska. Although people normally spell it uppa, it comes from the Yugtun *apa*, *ap'a*, *apaq*, *apa'urluq*, *aparrlugaq* (Jacobson, 1984, p 75).

Following are photos of the St. Sergious (Sergius) of Radonzeh Orthodox Church, located in Chuathbaluk.



Figure 6: St. Sergius Church in Chuathbaluk, Early 1900s

Early 20th Century Photo of St. Sergius Church. (Photo courtesy of Anchorage Historical and Fine Arts Museum.) This church was partially constructed at Kolmakovskiy Redoubt and then moved to Chuathbaluk where it was completed (Oswalt, 1980b).



Figure 7: Present-Day St. Sergious Church

Photo taken from ROSSIA¹² St. Sergious of Radonzeh located in Chuathbaluk. The church has the original iconostasis and many 19th century icons. In 2005 it was selected as one of the top ten Russian Orthodox sacred sites in Alaska.

As discussed under the leadership section, Orthodox priests often appointed a church chief, often an influential villager, to represent the church when the priest was not present. The Russian Orthodox religion endured, primarily due to the dedication of Creoles and Alaska Natives who had become leaders in their local churches. Left on their own after the Russian withdrawal in 1867, local church leaders continued to maintain village churches and held Orthodox services.

¹² ROSSIA Inc. is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to the preservation of Alaska's Russian Orthodox churches and iconography. The photo of the St. Sergious church was taken from the following website: <http://www.rossialaska.org/current-projects/saint-sergius-of-radonzeh/>

The chiefs had a special role in each church to see that the spiritual and physical needs of their members were met. In the absence of a priest the chief would speak in church. This merely formalized the roles of the former band leaders within the church structure. (Collins, 2004, p. 29)

Thus even in the absence of a priest, the church leaders continued Orthodoxy in the outlying villages. Even today, especially in those villages that do not have an Orthodox priest, the church leaders are responsible for continued attention to Orthodoxy.

Although local priests carried on after 1867, not all were fully equipped to continue when ties with Russia were cut:

The Creole priests who had remained in Alaska after the sale were not prepared by their traditional ecclesiastical education to cope with the complex new cultural situation. The diaries written during that time reveal moral deterioration and a lack of orientation. Clergymen were confused because what they were taught did not apply to the new circumstances. All of them continued to feel Russian and to pray for the imperial family as if it continued to be a reality to them; yet their existence depended on other sources, and they did not themselves know, nor could they teach their flocks, how to adjust to the new way of life. The Bishop and priests deeply regretted that the land was no longer Russian. (Shalkop, 1977, p. 133)

As previously explained, after the sale of Alaska, some Russians returned to their homeland, but most of the Creoles stayed. Alaska was their home. The Russian influence had spread to most parts of Alaska and the Creoles had strong ties of kin and friendship to the Unangan, Alutiiq, Tlingit, Yup'ik, and Athabascan communities. Over the decades after the purchase, they blended into these Native societies. Creoles were so successful at this survival strategy that most modern day Alaskans don't even know that the term Creole exists in Alaska or that the people it describes

were once the primary movers and shakers in this land we've come to call our own (Farmen, 2011, p. 4).

Over the course of time, Native communities reabsorbed the majority of the Creoles. One place where the Creoles (and Natives) retained or assumed preeminence, decision-making powers, and leadership was with the Russian Orthodox Church (Black, 2004, p. 219).

After 1867 there were also changes in the religious makeup of the region. With the influx of Protestant and Catholic missionaries, Orthodoxy faced competition. Even as early as 1898, reports out of Ikogmiut at Russian Mission expressed concern:

All the missions of other faiths have well-appointed American schools with a boarding school for boys and girls and also male and female teachers. They convert to their faith primarily the children being educated in their schools because it is only under those conditions that they accept them for training. The Natives willingly yield their children to study in these schools because for them learning the American language and the good support their children receive are alluring. Primarily they [the missionaries] choose those orphans who do not have relatives. (Korchinskii, 1898)

At the turn of the century and beyond, translation became a major problem for the Orthodox Church. From a report on the state of the Kvikhpak mission from June 1899 to June 1900, Father Iakov Korchinskii

reports with regret that many Orthodox Natives, especially of the Inkalit and American Indian languages, not having heard preaching on the Orthodox faith in their Native language for whole decades due to the impossibility of obtaining a good interpreter and the absence among them of people who understand the Orthodox truths, are in full material dependence on the Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries who live among them and freely speak their language and maintain well-organized schools with interpreters. (Korchinskii, 1900)

Father Michael Oleksa explains the translation problem from Russian to Yup'ik to English:

They had members of the Church who'd speak Yup'ik but they didn't have any that could speak Russian anymore. You needed both sides in order to do translations. . . . All the church books were in Slavonic. . . . So there must have been a gap there when there was no one who could have access to the Russian documents. (M. J. Oleksa, personal communication, April 2013)

Later reports from the Orthodox Church archives include pressure by the Catholic mission to marry in the Catholic Church and baptize children in the Catholic faith, the tearing down and destruction of Orthodox crosses, and other blatant acts of coercion.

As stated previously, early Orthodox priests viewed shamanism as sometimes useful in the cases of healing or spiritual interaction. However, as the American era progressed, the attitude changed to looking at shamanism as incompatible with Orthodox beliefs. The following 1898 report comes from the Kvikhpak Orthodox mission:

With a few exceptions, they [the local people] relate to the priest very well. They obediently carry out [his] advice and willingly listen to sermons, but they part with shamanism with difficulty, explaining their adherence to shamanism by the absence of medical aid, but in essence the reason is [their] completely savage state and religious ignorance. (Korchinskii, 1898)

Despite the sale of Alaska by the Russians, and the Americanization that has occurred since then, today Russian heritage is still part of Yup'ik (and in some areas, Alutiiq and Athabascan) self-identification and self-definition. Traits and beliefs that can be proven to be of Russian origin are spoken of or believed to be Native.

The area of their [Yup'ik] settlement has been penetrated by Russian pioneers perhaps as early as the end of the 18th century. At the time of Alaska's transfer to the United States the Yup'ik had been within the Russian political and economic orbit for about three generations. (Black, 1984, p. 21)

The same pride that was shown by Creoles who served as cultural brokers and became a means of survival and prestige, continues today:

The Creole "state of mind," seeking to embrace the best of two worlds, survives today. In fact, the "Creole Vision," if it can be named such, seems to have particular relevance to the present generation of Alaskan Natives, who, together with indigenous peoples worldwide, are seeking an identity in the modern world. The Creoles, regardless of their ancestry, attempted to create a society in which whatever was valuable or beautiful from the ancient culture was affirmed and cultivated, while each person was free to adopt whatever seemed useful or attractive from the new ways without feeling guilty or apologetic about doing so. This openness to both old and new, this "healthy adaptability," was and remains the hallmark of Aleut culture. It provides a model for others to consider today. (Oleksa 1990, p. 195)

Although the above reference by Oleksa refers to Alutiiq heritage, we see the same adaptability and cultural blending in the middle Kuskokwim region.

Theories and Concepts: Issues of Memory, Identity, and Ethnicity

When examining the role that Russian culture and worldview has on the ethnic identity of the indigenous people of the middle Kuskokwim region, we must look at theories of identity, ethnicity, and memory.

Identity is used to describe a person's conception and expression of their individuality or group affiliations. The use and implications of identity are complex

and often depend on the context. In the Western view it is often described in terms of separate domains, such as social, group, individual, and cultural identity. Social identity is defined as the portion of an individual's self-concept that is derived from the perceived membership in a relevant social group. Similarly, cultural identity is defined as the identity of a group or culture, or of an individual that is influenced by belonging to a group or culture. An individual's identity depends on various cultural identifiers. These cultural identifiers examine the condition of the subject from a variety of aspects, including place, gender, race, history, nationality, language, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, ethnicity, and aesthetics. Ethnicity is the state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition (Barth, 1969; Sokefeld, 1999).

Barth further states that an ethnic group is biologically self-perpetuating, that it shares fundamental cultural values, includes a specific field of communication and interaction, and has a membership that identifies itself and is identified by others. Culture bearing and the exhibition of culture are important aspects of ethnicity; however, only those aspects that the individuals themselves regard as significant help define the ethnic group. This is usually seen in overt signs or in basic values. The functioning of the ethnic group depends on the maintenance of a boundary and socially relevant factors (Barth, 1969, pp. 10-15).

Knowledge of ancestry is a necessary condition to ethnic identity. An individual with more than one heritage may choose to identify with one, none, or a combination of heritages. Mixed blood is sometimes used to describe a mixed heritage, and the association with blood quantum has special meaning for indigenous Americans (Spratt, 1994, p. 312). This is also true for Alaska Natives. I was told in several interviews that even though the person knew of some Russian heritage in their background, they still put down "four-fourths" when indicating Native blood.

Ethnicity encompasses specific but sometimes fluid social boundaries and traits, ethnic solidarity, ethnic conflict, and processes of acculturation or

assimilation. Sprott (1994) states that three theoretical models predominate in ethnicity research. The first is Erikson's individual psychological model based on developmental stages. This model focuses on the effects of socialization and how the individual acquires a sense of belonging from childhood. The second model, from Vaughan, is a psychological model that combines individual development with social intergroup comparisons and interactions. The third ethnicity model, by Root, is the most inclusive. Called the social ecological model, it takes into account the social, familial, and individual variables within a political/historical context (Sprott, 1994, p. 315).

Root agrees that there is a need to move away from linear models of identity development to a more interwoven approach that takes into consideration the interaction of societal, familial, and individual variables within the context of history (Root, 1992a, p. 182). As the United States and Alaska become more ethnically mixed, questions of individual identity become important: Who are you? How do you see yourself? With which group do you identify most? (Root, 1992b, p. 11).

Susan Keefe provides one modern approach to the study of ethnicity from her research in 1992. Of most interest to my study is her study of ethnic identity focusing on the "symbolic elements of the perceptions of the differences among ethnic groups, feelings of attachment to and pride in one's own ethnic group and cultural heritage as opposed to others, and the perception of prejudice and discrimination." Keefe also points out that ethnic identity can change over an individual's lifetime and in response to different situations and contexts (Keefe, 1992, pp. 35, 43).

Other important aspects to the study of identity include statements by Sokefeld and Rouse: "A shared identity does not have the same meaning for everyone who embraces it" (Sokefeld, 1999, p. 423). "Those who argue for the merits of single, fixed identities have increasingly been challenged by those who stress the value of maintaining multiple identities and moving fluidly between them" (Rouse, 1995, p. 351).

Individuals also can and do move between cultures. It is important to note the differences between transcultural and cross-cultural participation:

Transcultural is differentiated from cross-cultural, which refers to the participation of individuals in one or more cultures at *different times*. In a simplified way, transcultural refers to commonly shared culture, whereas cross-cultural emphasizes the segmenting of lives into different dimensions shared with different groups at different times. . . . Both the cultural and the transcultural lenses are merely constructs in each of our minds. (Schneider, 2002, p. 9)

Transculturation can also describe the continuous two-way borrowing and learning between cultures. This will be further discussed in the chapter 3.

Another very important concept when working with oral narratives and recollections of the past is to consider the issues of memory. Berliner (2005) states that people remember, forget and reinterpret their own pasts. The focus is on history as it is lived and on the remembrances shared and transmitted by groups. People experience and interpret their pasts from a multiplicity of viewpoints. He goes further by saying that the past is preserved because it remains relevant for later cultural use. Memory is the way that lasting traces of the past persist and is the transmission and persistence of cultural elements through the generations. "Memory is not these series of recalled mental images, but a synonym for cultural storage of the past: it is the reproduction of the past in the present, this accumulated past which acts on us and makes us act" (Berliner, 2005, pp. 200-201). Memory then can become everything that is transmitted across generations, everything stored in culture and almost indistinguishable from the concept of culture itself (p. 203).

Funkenstein (1989) brings up the point that the memories of people who have experienced the same event are not identical, because memory raises different associations and feelings (p. 6). "Most of our personal memories are both memories and the memory of memories. The past is the remembered present, just as the future is the anticipated present: memory is always derived from the present and

from the contents of the present” (pp. 8-9). However, memory can also be thought of less as a pot to be drawn from and more as something that exists only as it relates to present and future (W. Schneider, personal communication, October 2013).

People attempt to understand the past and give it meaning. The past and historical facts must be understood only in terms of the context in which they are rooted. The historian must reconstruct the context, and the reconstruction is tied to his point of view in the present. Funkenstein also makes an important observation that in the 19th century, collective memory was largely produced by historians and was found in textbooks and lectures (Funkenstein, 1989, pp. 12, 15-16, 20).

The creation of memory is not usually deliberate and can be based on a partial and subjective process. “People remember what they think is important” (Thomson, 2011, p. 84). For an event to be memorable, it usually requires a direct personal involvement. It could be a special or abnormal time of vivid experiences. The recollection and reactivation of a memory may also subtly change each time it is recalled (pp. 85-86).

There is a strong relationship between memory and identity. Identity is shaped by telling stories, either inner stories told to us or stories told to others in social contexts. Each person constructs and lives a narrative that is their identity. Memory stories create identity and identity shapes remembering. Our changing perspectives of the past and our current identities and ambitions, also subtly influence memory stories (Thomson, 2011, p. 90).

Therefore, it is important to realize that what people remember is not always what is historically accurate. Portelli (2006) describes such an incident involving a Nazi massacre in retaliation for a partisan Italian raid on German troops. As time has passed, stories and recollections have changed and adapted to what people believe should have happened. Oral stories are not impersonal; the tale can include information shared and heard from others. They can be intensely remembered but “conflictally” narrated.

One of the interesting concepts of memory and identity is that identity depends on memory and memory depends on identity. Memory and identity are connected. Identity depends on the idea of memory, and vice versa. Memories are revised to fit current identities.

The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what I remembered is defined by the assumed identity. . . We are constantly revising our memories to suit our current identities. Memories help us make sense of the world we live in. (Gillis, 1994, p. 3)

In modern society, individuals often have to play many different roles, a condition of having too many conflicting selves and too many identities (Gillis, 1994, p. 4). In the middle Kuskokwim region, the roles for one individual could include Yup'ik, Russian and European ancestry, elder, man, husband, father, grandfather, hunter, tribal member, veteran, church leader, village member, Alaskan, and American, just to name a few.

The struggles and interactions between identity and memory make it apparent that identities and memories are highly selective, serving particular interests at different times. "Identities and memories are not things we think about, but things we think with" (Gillis, 1994, p. 4-5).

The recording of oral narratives and memories is relatively new. Prior to the 19th century, people felt that the past was so much a part of the present that there was no need to record or preserve it. They relied on living memory. Today we speak so much about memory because there is so little of it left (Gillis, 1994, p. 6-7). Why cultivate memory when we can just "Google" the answer to get the historical perspective? The indigenous oral tradition of passing on stories and family history is becoming a lost art. Oral tradition is in competition with commercial and official documentation.

Grandparents are no longer doing the memory work they once performed. In particular families, it is wives and mothers who pick up the slack. Every attic is an archive, every living room a museum. Never before has so much been recorded, collected; and never before has remembering been so compulsive, even as rote memorization ceases to be central to the educational process. What we can no longer keep in our heads is now kept in storage. . . . On one hand, the past has become so distant and the future so uncertain that we can no longer be sure what to save, so we save everything. (Gillis, 1994, pp. 14-15)

Megill (1998) talks about an insecurity about identity that generates an excessive preoccupation with memory: "Where identity is problematized, memory is valorized" (p. 40). Megill also calls identity statements self-designations. Self-designation is how "we" choose to name ourselves, how "we" designate ourselves in language. Memory becomes important where people are engaged in self-designation "for it serves as a stabilizer of and justification for the self-designations that people claim" (p. 42).

Many therapists see memory as a marker of the lived experiences through which the self's identity has come into being, possessing an authenticity of its own:

It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that we ought to remember the past . . . but we do not remember the past. Rather, what we remember is the present: that is, we remember that which, from the past, continues to live within our situations now. We think the past: that is, we construct or reconstruct it on the basis of certain critical procedures. The relevant motto is: *Remember the present, think the past.* (Megill, 1998, p. 51)

Megill (1998) also states that the relations between history and memory are difficult. He warns against viewing memory as the raw material of history, as many

believe. He also states that it is a mistake to think that history is to be reconstructed by adding together the detailed, fragmentary experiences of its participants (p. 54).

Although I agree that memory is subjective and dependent on the situation, that it is not as “irrational, inconsistent, deceptive or self-serving” (Megill, 1998, p. 56) as Megill believes. He goes on to state that memory cannot serve as a marker of the historical past without independent corroboration, that the claims that memory makes are only possibly true, in contrast to history, which reminds memory of the need for evidence from witnesses and material remains. Although he concludes that both history and memory are “arrogant” and that history has an element of “unknowability,” Megill, as a professor of history, still stresses history’s authenticity (Megill, 1998, p. 57).

An ethnohistorical approach can be useful when studying the past, as ethnohistory is invested in what people think, sometimes in juxtaposition with what actually happened, leading to clues to understanding culture, values, and standards. Ethnohistorians are concerned with all sides of the story, etic and emic, written sources as well as what people say. Incorporating an indigenous approach into the more formulaic approaches to ethnohistory is key. An indigenous approach to research will be discussed in the next chapter on research methodologies.

Indigenous Identity

As can be seen by the above summary, there has been much discussion among Western authors of memory, identity, and ethnicity. It is important to remember that when looking at indigenous identity, we need to consider a more holistic and perhaps more practical approach.

Typically when people from the middle Kuskokwim region meet, the first response is to establish a personal relationship. The question “Who are you?” “*Kit'usit?*” is used as a way of making a connection. Telling the person where you’re from, who your family is, and who you are, is a way of giving the person you are

meeting a connection, just in case they know your family or someone from your village. Each person shares their parents or grandparents and determines if they are related to the other person or what type of mutual relationship they may have. It also helps establish the type of interaction that you will have with the person you just met. Relationships are based on personal identity, your ancestors, your family tree, and how you are tied into others around you.

This focus on relationships as the key to identity is also seen as a primary theme in the writings of indigenous researchers. Kawagley (1995) uses a tetrahedral framework that describes the human worldview as a triangulation between the natural, human and spiritual realms. This allows humans to locate themselves in relation to the other domains to ensure that values and traditions are in balance. This interrelationship relies on communication between the realms to maintain balance and keep the structure strong (pp. 15-18).

Wilson (2009) focuses on reciprocity and balance with his emphasis on the three Rs. Just as meaningful research needs to be based on the three Rs—Respect, Reciprocity and Relationality,—indigenous identity includes a unique way of viewing the world and of being that includes cosmology, worldview, epistemology, and ethical beliefs (p. 15). The shared aspects of indigenous ontology (the nature of being, existence, behavioral aspects) and epistemology (knowledge, beliefs) is relationality, as relationships form reality (p. 137). Wilson's emphasis on the three Rs is applicable to all research, both indigenous and non-indigenous. If you follow these principles you get better results. Using Wilson's three Rs as a universal approach to research illustrates the simplistic power of these guiding principles.

The relational nature of identity and the building of relationships are key in both Kawagley's and Wilson's approaches to indigenous identity. Just as Wilson finds that indigenous identity includes a unique way of viewing the world and of being, my identity framework shows the complexity of identity that is built on indigenous axiology.

Identity is very much tied to values. Lewis (2009) in his study of Native elders found that their ties to subsistence activities and the land were very important. “The concept of being active in subsistence activities contributes to their well-being and identity; as a Native people they are directly connected to the land and water, and their identity and knowledge derives from their experiences with the land” (p. 102). The practice of Native traditions and the respect for land and nature are important indigenous values that are reflected in people’s identity.

Lewis (2009) also identified spirituality as one of the major components of successful aging. He also found from his research that what was taught in church was traditionally taught by elders:

These references to spirituality and the teachings by religious leaders and Elders are important for demonstrating continuity across generations. Religion is a thread that weaves through each of the generations, being passed down either through church sermons or traditional stories. (pp. 98-99) Spirituality is also recognized as a key indigenous value.

One Western measure of identity that has impacted the ongoing definition of identity in the middle Kuskokwim region, and throughout Alaska, is the concept of blood quantum. The concept of blood quantum was not widely applied until the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. Although most tribes no longer rely on blood quantum for membership, the blood quantum model was used in 1971 for enrollment in ANCSA, with far-reaching effects on how people think about themselves.

Section 3 (b) “Native” means a citizen of the United States who is a person of one-fourth degree or more Alaska Indian (including Tsimshian Indians not enrolled in the Metlakatla Indian Community), Eskimo, or Aleut blood, or combination thereof. The term includes any Native as so defined either or both of whose adoptive parents are not Native. . . . This defines who is an Alaska Native for the purpose of ANCSA. The standard practice of the Bureau

of Indian Affairs is to consider any Native American of one-fourth or more Native blood to be eligible for federal services. Persons of one-fourth Native blood would include those who had at least one full-blooded grandparent. However, any blood combination resulting in at least one-fourth Native blood would qualify. (Ongtooguk, 2004, p. 4)

Although the actual percentage of blood quantum no longer has bearing on services received, the perceived importance of this designation significantly impacts how people think of themselves today. I was told in an interview with two sisters and their cousin that although they knew they had Russian blood, they still put down four-fourths (indicating a full blood Alaska Native).

#1c: Well that's how I got interested [in our Russian grandparents] because of my children and their need to know.

CJ: And were you happy later when you found out?

#1c: Yes, and we're all Alaskan Natives.

#1a: That's what I put, Alaskan Native and when they want percentage you put four-fourths.

#1c: And they say four-fourths what? And I say whatever you want to put. [laughs] And they put Yup'ik and I say I'm not Yup'ik. [laughs] We leave it at that.

In a discussion about ethnicity in the Kodiak area, Gordon Pullar talked about the change in views regarding blood quantum. At one point four-fourths was considered a status symbol but is now often viewed as worthless and inaccurate. People will say that they are four-fourths and then go on to say that their grandparents were European. There is European influence in the majority of families. It is fairly recent to share European ancestry. Nobody cares about four-fourths (G. L. Pullar, personal communication, May 2012).

When looking at indigenous identity in the middle Kuskokwim we need to take a syncretistic approach. Syncretism is an anthropological theory that describes the way divergent cultures converge and share and in essence create their own hybrid. This fusion produces a new version that bridges the gap between the old and the new. Just as Yup'ik and Athabascan cultures have blended, and just as Creoles sometimes served roles as cultural brokers, the syncretism of cultural traits and beliefs provide the same mediating approach that blends cultures together. Perhaps one of the most evident instances of syncretism in the middle Kuskokwim occurred in the religious fusion of indigenous beliefs with that of the Russian Orthodox Church. The practice of the Russian Orthodox religion is a key part of cultural identity for many in the middle Kuskokwim region. This blending of religious beliefs carries over to the present time. Syncretism will be more thoroughly discussed as a part of methodology in chapter 3.

Summary

In a multicultural world, ethnohistorical documentation is very important to societies. Change is a part of cultural adaptation, whether it is change from the blending of indigenous groups who come into contact with one another or a nonindigenous incursion. Change can also be the successful solution to a problem. Documenting and understanding cultural change and cultural identity is vital for the sustainability of the culture, not only to understand where it has been but also where it is going. By using a variety of archival and ethnohistorical research, combined with local cultural knowledge and present-day interviews, we will be able to peer more clearly into a past that has produced roots that support the present generation and gain insight into contemporary cultural identity.

This chapter summarizes my existing research and cultural documentation as it pertains to the study of cultural change, including precontact indigenous cultural blending, the Russian era, cultural change and indigenous adaptation during

the Russian era, the establishment of the Creole class and their role as cultural brokers, changes in Creole individuality and power after the sale of Alaska, changes in religion and education after the sale, and theories and concepts: issues of memory, identity, and ethnicity, including indigenous identity.

The literature that has been collected and reviewed focuses around my research questions: What impact did Russian explorers, traders, and Orthodox clergy have on the middle Kuskokwim River region of Alaska? How has Russian influence changed over time, and how has this Russian heritage impacted present-day cultural identity in the middle Kuskokwim region? Included is the broader discussion of how people in the region define their identity and what aspects of that identity are most important to them.

My research on identity and ethnicity in the middle Kuskokwim region is contributing to the validity of these terms as they are conceptualized from within. I have examined literature from the outside and now will show how people think of themselves, putting forth another analytic framework, a model for looking at identity that is absent from the current literature. My research methodology is discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodologies, Theoretical Frameworks, and Research Issues

Introduction

As stated previously, the purpose of my study is to examine cultural change and adaptation along the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska during the years of Russian contact and exploration, and the changes that occurred after the sale of Alaska and to relate that to present-day cultural identity and heritage.

This chapter describes the procedures and methods used in the study and is divided into the following subsections: personal perspective, context of the study, collaboration and research protocol, research design (methodologies and data collection), theoretical frameworks for effective research and analysis, and limitations of the study.

Personal Perspective

While I was taking undergraduate classes, and even for my one semester in graduate school in 1974, anthropologists who portrayed themselves as experts bothered me. How could they propose to be an expert if they were not a part of the culture or community? I could not see myself following that route. In recent years anthropological work has become much more collaborative, but still it took me almost thirty years to feel that I finally had the beginning of enough local cultural understanding to enable me to pursue research.

I have been fortunate to get to know many people from the villages in the middle Kuskokwim region. I worked with the local Native association and village councils in the 1970s, and later while working for the school district in 1983, I organized the first Elders Conference in the region. We continued the annual Elders-Youth Conferences for 16 years. During that time I got to know many of our Elders quite well and saw the joy they had in getting together and the pride of passing on knowledge to the students. Mutual respect has been the foundation of these lifelong

friendships. I have also developed a deep respect and love of the culture of the region, have been very interested in collecting archival resources, and have built a good lending library at the school district, as well as my own personal library.

In beginning to develop my own research philosophy, I have struggled with several key questions:

- How could someone from outside of the culture they are studying, propose to be an expert in their field?
- Why do Western research methods fall short?
- How can archival research be used and analyzed and what benefit is it for past cultural and historical documentation?
- How can current indigenous knowledge be gathered and how does it relate to past ways of life?

I have struggled with how to view archival materials. My early academic training as an undergraduate in the early 1970s had taught me that anthropologists were objective ethnographers whose documentation was based in scientific, nonbiased observation. This naïve view gradually changed over time to the belief that these early observations contained kernels of truth, even if biased. But I still struggled to understand if these archival resources were accurate and how or if they could be used.

It was somewhat of a “light bulb” moment when I learned to appreciate the perspective that Western researchers, although claiming objectivity and cultural neutrality, are indoctrinated into their own way of knowing. Scientists often have an idea of what they want to prove, and they go out and prove it. Observations are colored by our own culture and background. We are all governed by our own research paradigm of how ideas relate to one another and the framework in which research is carried out.

It is also important to remember that being part of a community does not mean a *carte blanche* ticket. In fact to me it means there is added responsibility to do a good job and to accurately represent what people say. There is the realization

that my role as a researcher takes on a different perception than just a community member. The presence of a tape recorder and note pad changes one's status in terms of control. Although the interviews are semistructured and open ended, the atmosphere is different than just a friendly visit.

Another interesting new status for me that somewhat affects my relationship with people is one as an "elder." Approximately 30 years ago, when the school district started offering lunch services for elders, the funding agency used the somewhat arbitrary age of 60 for services. That age was also the age where our schools encouraged elders to have their photo taken during school picture week to be put up on the wall of their local school and the school district office, and a copy given to them. So in our region, the age of 60 became established as an important milestone for recognition as an elder. People would often ask, "Are you an elder yet?" and the conversation continued as to how many years they or I had to wait. So when I reached 60 I was then considered an elder of the region (at least by age), a status for which I felt totally unworthy. I realize of course that as a non-indigenous person I will never have the knowledge base of those who were born and raised in the region. However, that new elder designation also meant a new level of acceptance and status, which I think was enhanced because I had been living in the area for almost 40 years, and yes, I am now up on the wall. Teasing has always been a form of acceptance, and the teasing I received at 60 (or almost 62 as I am now), was that I was only a "baby elder." This was the term jokingly used by some of the 70-80-age crowd. I rather like it.

Context of the Study

The study area is the middle Kuskokwim river region of Alaska encompassing the present-day villages of Lower Kalskag, Upper Kalskag, Aniak, Chuathbaluk, Crooked Creek, Napaimute, Georgetown, Red Devil, Sleetmute, and Stony River, an approximate distance of 200 river miles. A map of this region is

included in chapter 1. This is also the area of the present-day Kuspuk School District that includes these villages and the surrounding area, approximately 14,000 square miles. This area is located roughly midway between Bethel at the lower end of the Kuskokwim and McGrath at the upper end of the river.



Figure 8: View Across River From Aniak During Spring Break-up

Although the study focuses on the villages and people of this area, the region is by no means secluded, and in fact, the historical ease of access into the middle Kuskokwim played a major role in impacting the culture and changes that occurred over time.

Collaboration and Research Protocol

My research includes collaboration with local traditional village/tribal councils, the Kuspuk School District, elders, and indigenous co-workers. The annual

Elders-Youth Conference that is held in our area provided an opportunity to share my research with teachers, students, the community, and elders.

Throughout my studies I have also made a concerted effort to share my research with the community. At the 2012 and 2013 regional Elders Conferences, sponsored by the Kuskokwim Native Association (KNA) and held in Kalskag and Aniak respectively, I was asked to do presentations on the history of the region. KNA is the nonprofit subregional Native organization representing the villages of the middle Kuskokwim region as well as Russian Mission on the Yukon. I presented a historical summary of the middle Kuskokwim region and my intended research. After the 2012 presentation I was asked a lot of questions about the more recent 20th century history of the area, such as reindeer herding and mining. Elders present remembered hearing stories from their parents and grandparents and were very much interested in that era. After those discussions I realized that recent economic, social, legislative and organizational impacts were important when looking at identity in the middle Kuskokwim. One's sense of identity is very much influenced by village, regional and state organizations and their various educational, political, social, and governmental impacts. Thus my focus was broadened to also consider these influences.

I have also made presentations explaining my research to the tribal council in Aniak and the school district's Indian Education Committee. The tribal council of Upper Kalskag has provided letters of support for my admission into the Ph.D. program and for the Mellon Fellowship. Copies of my research papers on the middle Kuskokwim are available to teachers in the Kuspuk School District as additional social studies and cultural resources. I have also shared my historical knowledge with students in the classroom. These presentations, discussions, and questions have provided feedback on what is important to people in our area and ideas for further research.

In the process of analyzing my interview data, I have also checked back with some of those interviewed to ask them if I have represented their words correctly.

Their feedback has been very useful. I have also checked with local Yup'ik educators to make sure I have included Yugtun words that are correctly spelled and used properly. Specifics on this ongoing collaboration are explained more thoroughly in the section on data collection.

Research Design: Methodologies

My research paradigm requires an articulation and examination of value systems and is built upon indigenous methodologies. Wilson (2009), in his book *Research is Ceremony*, stresses that research needs to be built on mutual respect and transparency. Wilson helped me begin to understand indigenous methodologies and formulate my research philosophy. His focus on the three Rs, Respect, Reciprocity, and Relationality, as the guiding light for meaningful research makes perfect sense to me. Wilson reminds us that we need to understand and use an indigenous research paradigm that takes into account people's ontology (the nature of being, existence, behavioral aspects), epistemology (knowledge, beliefs), and axiology (values) and focuses on respect, reciprocity, and relationality when doing research.

The focus on relationships, responsibility, respect and reciprocity is echoed in the critical indigenous research methodologies (CIRM) approach that is built on indigenous knowledge systems and focuses on the needs of communities, beginning with the needs and concerns of indigenous people. To Wilson's three Rs, individual and community accountability is added. CIRM is rooted in indigenous knowledge systems, is anticolonial, and focuses on the needs of communities. Knowledge is relational, and there is trust between the researcher and the community where the researcher is responsible to the community. Relationality within the context of research intends that information gained should serve the needs of the community. Research is a process of fostering relationships between researchers, communities, and the topic of inquiry where researchers are trustworthy and held accountable. There is respect by the researcher for the community and its individuals as well as

respect by the community and individuals for the researcher. Thus everything is in balance and reciprocal (Brayboy, et al., 2012).

There is also an underlying assumption of self-determination and sovereignty in Brayboy's work, that is, the validity of indigenous peoples' conception/construction of identity(ies) (B. Leonard, personal communication, November 2013).

Brayboy et al. (2012) recognize the political positioning of indigenous peoples in contemporary societies and reasons that it is of little use to create frameworks rooted in these principles of relationships, reciprocity, and responsibility if these methodologies do not also promote emancipatory agendas that recognize the self-determination and inherent sovereignty of indigenous peoples (p. 448).

The choices of research methods have to complement the indigenous methodology chosen. Again respect, reciprocity, and relationality form the base upon which all research should be done. Relational accountability requires the formation of reciprocal and respectful relationships within the communities. Interviews should be open-ended and based on dialogue, which helps strengthen relationships with people rather than violating trust through use of inappropriate methods. Relationality as the guiding light of indigenous research also means that all things are related and therefore relevant (Wilson, 2009, p. 58). This also places responsibility on the researcher to explain how things are related and why people find meaning in the relationship.

The relational way of being is at the heart of being indigenous. Indigenous identity is grounded in indigenous values, including relationships with the land, the ancestors, and with future generations. Really listening to the stories is important. Brayboy (2005) writes, "stories as 'data' are important, and one key to collecting these data is 'hearing' the stories" (p. 440). The stories told by indigenous people provide an important data source.

Heritage and identity manifest themselves in many ways. One of the key ways is through oral narrative. “When heritage fails to speak to us, the stories fade into obscurity, becoming artifacts of the past. The oral tradition thrives when a group knows the old stories, values them, and finds reason and occasion to retell them to later generations” (Schneider, 2011, p. 61).

Methodological approaches to research need to respect indigenous cultural knowledge. It is not a question of if we need to consider indigenous inquiry, but what qualitative approaches to use that value both process and content (Kovach, 2009, pp. 24-25).

The Alaska Native Knowledge Network’s *Guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge* (2000), and the *Alaska Federation of Natives Guidelines for Research* (1993) were used as guides to promote mutual respect and communication. Local tribal councils and indigenous co-workers were informed and involved in the research. I draw upon elder interviews and interviews with younger local people to provide an indigenous perspective on cultural change and heritage. Informed consent forms were explained and collected from all interviewees.

Research Design: Data Collection

The primary research method used in this study is ethnohistorical research. Ethnohistorical research entails the use of written historical materials and a people’s oral literature in reconstructing their own history (Lantis, 1970, p. 5).

Of course the key components of my research are the interviews conducted with indigenous elders and adults from the region who have Russian ancestry. My interview analysis will be discussed later in this section.

An indigenous research approach, involving local people’s cultural knowledge, has been critical to my research. I have been a resident of the area being studied; thus participant observational research is an integral part of my research and interactions with people on a daily basis. I used archival

and archaeological research along with more modern-day ethnographies and elder and community interviews. My research approach combines ethnohistorical research, observation, and indigenous methodologies in a qualitative research paradigm.

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) discuss potential sources of past information, including documents, quantitative records, oral records, and relics or artifacts. Sources can be described as primary resources, which are documents where the individual who is describing the event was present, or secondary resources, which include documents where the researcher obtained a description from someone else who may or may not have been present when the event occurred.

Ethnographic research also is based in observational methods. In ethnographic research the researcher uses observation to analytically describe the culture. Here the researcher attempts to learn about and record the culture of the group he or she is studying. Genzuck (2003) describes ethnography as a social science research method that relies heavily on up-close, personal experience that can also involve participation, not just observation. Typical ethnographic research uses three kinds of data collection: interviews, observation, and documents, which produce data in the form of quotations, descriptions, and excerpts of documents. The product is often a narrative description that can include charts, diagrams and artifacts to help tell the story. Thus historical research relies on the triangulation of data, obtaining information in many ways from various sources. However it is important to remember that this Western scientific approach carries with it its own set of cultural biases.

Tedlock (1979) stresses that discourse should be kept in open discussion rather than hidden away in footnotes, appendices, and unpublished manuscripts (p. 387). The dialogue that begins in the field should not stop after the anthropologist leaves the field. This new discourse is a continuing process, as opposed to classic analogical anthropology where the ethnographer and Native are not “articulate between the same two covers” (p. 389). The new dialogical approach includes

“dialogues that occur face-to-face and side-by-side in the meeting grounds of cultures” (p. 397). In short Tedlock emphasizes recognizing the voice of those being interviewed as a critical part of any study.

It also means that we need to dialogue with the people who provide us with knowledge about how we interpret and understand what they have told us. It is part of a larger issue with me that hearing something once isn't really as good as living with several tellings over time, particularly in cases where we may not be sure of intent and meaning. For Tedlock it is probably also a question of the “authoring function” (whose voice and authority gets privileged). He would argue that it is, in Michael Frisch's term, a “shared authority” by which Frisch would argue the importance of what is shared and what is interpreted by the writer. (W. Schneider, personal communication, October 2013)

As stated previously, I utilize participant observational research in this study. Since moving to Aniak in 1976 I have had the opportunity to live and work within a community of the middle Kuskokwim region. I also traveled to many other villages in the area and interacted with people long before I even thought about any type of research. I participated in Russian Orthodox services and special occasions such as Russian Christmas. I hosted Selavik (Russian Christmas) in my home since my daughter was born in 1982 and baptized in that faith. I attended numerous funerals and gatherings at people's homes. I participated in subsistence activities at fish camp, berry picking, and cutting up moose and caribou and spent time with local women beading, skin sewing, basket making, and I participated in Yup'ik dance. I organized Elder-Youth Conferences for 16 years and know many of our elders as well as many who have passed away. I talked with elders informally and have also done individual and group interviews. And I raised my daughter to appreciate both her Caucasian and her Yup'ik and Athabascan roots. Therefore, I believe I have an advantage when doing participatory research, in that I have prior experience living

and working in the region that is now the focus of my study. For this research, I involved local elders and others from the community that I have gotten to know over the last 38 years and Native co-workers to help document indigenous knowledge of the more recent historical past.

For my own research involving the history and culture of the middle Kuskokwim region, I examined archival resources, including those that may be biased, in order to glean the kernels of truth. That combined with local oral traditions and stories forms the basis of my ethnohistorical approach. Care needs to be taken when using archival missionary or trader's reports to help illustrate what interactions may have been like between Westerners and indigenous peoples and how that shaped the history of the region.

I utilized open-ended questions in my interviews as a primary way of collecting data. Reinharz's (1992) discussion of interviewing techniques is particularly useful. The use of loosely structured and open-ended interviews produced more of a conversational research approach that allows those interviewed, in their own words, to reveal their own significant issues and concerns and to understand their ties to one another and links to families, community, and the theology they embraced (p. 281).

Semi-structured or unstructured interviewing . . . is a qualitative data-gathering technique. It differs from ethnography in not including long periods of researcher participation in the life of the interviewee and differs from survey research or structured interviewing by including free interaction between the researcher and interviewee. Survey research typically excludes, and interview research typically includes, opportunities for clarification and discussion. Open-ended interview research explores people's views of reality and allows the researcher to generate theory. In this way it complements quantitatively oriented, closed-ended interview research that tries to test hypotheses. (Reinharz, 1992, p. 18)

Group interviews can be useful; however, I have personally seen some instances when one or two outspoken people dominate the discussion. In a group of Native elders I have noticed that some older Native women may not speak up if an elder man is speaking. Only at the end may they add a small observation that clearly illustrates that they have in-depth knowledge on the subject being discussed. On the plus side, in a group interview, good discussions can take place where ideas are shared and one person builds upon what another has said. The group interview technique worked well recently when I interviewed two sisters and their cousin who shared their perspectives on their Russian heritage.

Schneider (2011) stresses that special consideration must be given when conducting cross-cultural interviews, where the interviewer and interviewee come from different backgrounds and experiences and may not share common assumptions about meaning. The interviewer must recognize the conventions and protocols and also the “symbols and beliefs that inform the speakers in their lives” (p. 52). When recording a story, not only what is said but also the context in which it is recorded and how the interviewer is using narrative to create meaning becomes very important. “Recording and writing about stories may fix their meaning in place, and without other recordings and context, meaning can get sandwiched and packaged in ways that distort meaning. The oral tradition is timeless; the written record seeks closure” (p. 56).

I appreciate Reinharz’s (1992) perspective on contemporary ethnography as a multimethod research including observation, participation, archival analysis, and interviewing, combining the assets and weaknesses of each method. Open-ended interviewing and ethnography focus on interpretation, rely on the researcher’s immersion in social settings, and aim for intersubjective understanding between researchers and the person(s) studied (p. 46). Reinharz uses the term triangulation to describe the use of multiple research methods in a single study. Multiple methods work to enhance the understanding both by adding layers of information and by using one type of data to validate or refine another (pp. 197-201). An example of

multiple methods combines historical and contemporary materials, where the researcher utilizes archival documents, analyzes changing conditions, and conducts in-depth interviews, thus combining the use of ethnographic data with quantitative data analysis. Multimethod research creates the opportunity to put texts or people in contexts, thus providing a richer and far more accurate interpretation (pp. 204-207).

Before the interview phase of my research, I felt it was important to become familiar with the ethnohistoric documents that were available on the history and ethnography of the middle Kuskokwim region. Knowing the area's history becomes an important part of the analysis because it greatly affects people's view of their identity. The examination of historical and archival data includes translations of early Russian journals by Iakov Netsvetov and Lieutenant Lavrentiy A. Zagoskin. Also available are archaeological studies of several sites along the middle Kuskokwim. Twentieth-century ethnographical work by Wendell Oswalt, James VanStone, Cornelius Osgood, Lydia Black, and Ann Fienup-Riordan, among others provides a more recent interpretation of the culture of the area. These published resources are readily available. University library collections were also utilized to examine more obscure historical and cultural studies. Another important source of research has been a number of conferences, seminars, institutes, symposia, and international collaboration in the past 20-plus years focusing on arctic social sciences, Russian America, and related topics. I also found dissertations very useful for structure and the examination of methodology and theoretical perspectives.

I interviewed 26 individuals, 24 from the region. Of the Alaska Natives interviewed, all were from the region, 20 women and four men. Two were in their 80s, three in their 70s, five in their 60s, ten in their 50s, one in their 40s, and three less than 40 years.

Groups include two sisters and their cousin, another group of two co-workers, and a third group of three co-workers; otherwise the interviews were

individual. Two of the individuals interviewed were not Alaska Native, but were interviewed because of their historical and cultural knowledge of the region.

All names have been kept confidential. The following table shows the villages, age grouping, and gender of area residents interviewed for this study.

Table 1: Description of People Interviewed

Middle Kuskokwim Interviews		
Home Village	Age	Male or Female
Lower Kalskag	Less than 40	F
Lower Kalskag	50-60	F
Lower Kalskag	50-60	F
Lower Kalskag	50-60	F
Lower Kalskag	50-60	M
Lower Kalskag	50-60	M
Lower Kalskag	60-70	F
Lower Kalskag	60-70	F
Upper Kalskag	50-60	F
Upper Kalskag	50-60	F
Upper Kalskag	50-60	F
Upper Kalskag	60-70	M
Upper Kalskag	70-80	F
Aniak	40-50	F
Aniak	50-60	F
Aniak	60-70	F
Aniak	80+	F
Chuathbaluk	50-60	F
Chuathbaluk	70-80	F
Crooked Creek	Less than 40	F
Crooked Creek	Less than 40	F
Crooked Creek	70-80	M
Sleetmute	60-70	F
Sleetmute	80+	F

A loose set of questions helped guide these semistructured and open-ended interviews. Interviews were done at regional gatherings of elders at two Elders Conferences in 2012 and 2013, in the evenings during school district inservices in 2012, and in elders' homes. Most of the interviews were conducted in a quiet room with a minimum of distractions. Consent forms were signed by all those interviewed and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Each person interviewed was given a copy of his or her consent form at the time of the interview. Later they were also given or mailed a copy of their individual interview in CD-ROM format.

Key interview questions included where their Russian ancestry came from, how they found out about their Russian ancestry, how they felt about it, if they were passing on this information to their children or grandchildren, and what they felt was important to pass down. Other questions dealt with their Native ancestry and religion, traditional foods, and ways of life.

A set of questions was used to help guide the semistructured interviews. The open discussion and dialogue often led from one subject to another without the use of specific questions. Clarifying questions were asked when necessary. It is also important to note that often the interview dialogue led to a discussion of “Native blood” just as much as Russian ancestry. Following are some of the basic questions used during the interviews:

- Are you part Russian or do you have any Russian ancestors?
- Are you Yup'ik or Athabascan or any other mix?
- How did you find out about your Russian ancestry?
- What do you know about your Russian grandparents or great-grandparents (or ancestors)? Did they do trapping or trading? Did they run a store or trading post?
- Did your Russian grandparents or great-grandparents speak Russian? Did they speak Yup'ik or Athabascan?
- Where did your Russian ancestors come from? How did they come into the area?
- What activities do you remember or have heard about from that time?
- What are some Russian foods that are still made today (that have become part of the traditional diet)?
- Were your Russian ancestors/grandparents or great-grandparents involved in the Orthodox Church? Is your family Russian Orthodox?
- If their family or ancestors were Catholic, did they spend time at the Holy Cross Mission?
- Do you know of any Russian traditions/culture that are still going on today?

• There seems like there is a blending of Yup'ik and Orthodox traditions in the church; do you know anything about that?

- Have you heard any stories about Russians?
- Who are some of the Russians you heard about that lived in this area?
- Who are some of the other Russian families around here?
- What did they do? How did they live? What have you heard about them?
- How did the Russians get together with Native women? How did they meet?
- Did you hear of anyone ever trading with the Russians?
- Did you hear of anyone talking about the Russian forts at Kolmakovskiy, the one down by Dillingham, or at Russian Mission or anywhere else?
- Do you remember any stories about how things changed after Russia sold Alaska/after Alaska became part of the United States?
- What do you think is important to pass down to your children or grandchildren from your Russian heritage?
- How do you feel about being part Russian? Are you proud of being Russian?

During the analysis I asked a few follow-up questions to some of my interviewees:

- Do you think the Russians (or your Russian ancestors) were identified as White/Caucasians?
- Did their actions or marrying into the local culture change how they were thought of?
- Do you think your Russian ancestor or their descendants had an advantage or opportunities because they were Russian or part Russian?
- Were there things that were different for them because they were Russian?
- Did they have a position of leadership in the village or the church?

With some of my interviewees who were fluent in Yugtun, I also asked clarifying questions on words used, including the words for upriver and downriver people, terms for half-breed or Russian, correct spelling of foods and other Yugtun

words, Yup'ik versus Yupiaq, and what is currently done when Orthodox baptismal names and "Native" names are given.

All interviews were transcribed in the interviewee's own words. The transcriptions were coded so that all interviewees, whether they wanted to remain anonymous or not, were given a number rather than using a name or initials. This is to protect their identity, especially when using quotations. Those who have given permission for me to use their names are thanked in the acknowledgements for their contributions.

Lastly, for those interviewees who were available via email, I emailed them my draft table of contents and the portions of their interviews I planned to include in the thesis (with no identifying names), and asked them if they felt I had represented their words correctly.

There was a wide range of knowledge of their Russian past, from families who had traced their ancestry to the first Russian who came to Alaska to those families that didn't know much about their ancestry. Likewise the amount of information passed down to their children or grandchildren varied, but all agreed that it was important to know their ancestry. Most said they never thought much about their Russian ancestry, focusing primarily on their Native ancestry.

My analytic process for examining the transcribed interviews involves three steps:

1. Thematic identification: identify recurring themes in the interviews
2. Focus on resonant narratives around identity using people's own words
3. Theoretical framework for analysis: examine the actual narratives to determine a model for what identity means in the middle Kuskokwim

From the transcriptions, key themes were identified. Those points of discussion included the blending of indigenous Native groups in the area, principally Yup'ik and Athabascan; the blending of Catholicism and Orthodoxy in many families; the influence of the Holy Cross Catholic mission; physical characteristics that often

identified Russian ancestry; importance of maintenance of the Russian Orthodox church and Russian prayer and song books; knowledge of Russian foods and words that have become part of the Native culture; stories about Russians; the influence of the Cold War on Russian identity; distinction between Russian and White/Caucasian ancestry; advantages or disadvantages for Russian ancestors; and the effect of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood on how people identified themselves.

I interviewed two recognized scholars, both of whom have given their permission to use their names. Father Michael Oleksa, a noted author and lecturer, is an Orthodox priest who has done extensive study on Russian Orthodoxy in Alaska, has taught cross-cultural classes, and has written several books and articles on Orthodoxy and Alaska Natives. The other non-Native interviewed was Ray Collins of McGrath, who has worked with upper Kuskokwim language and cultural research. He lived for several years in Nikolai, has been an Athabascan instructor at the university level, has managed the university rural education center in McGrath, and has written publications for the villages of Nikolai and Telida. Their perspectives on Orthodoxy and culture were very important especially from an historical perspective. In these two cases, and in other instances where I have used information told to me from faculty, I have cited it as personal communication from the particular individual.

Also utilized were already collected interviews from my master's thesis work. Another source of interviews are previously collected recordings of interviews done from elders in our area.

The various sources of archival data were analyzed to help summarize what life was like in the middle Kuskokwim region at time of contact and the changes that occurred after the sale of Alaska. Ethnological sources add to that information and also help explain cultural change. This research will make old archival data accessible as an important part of history of the region. Historical summaries and references will become more readily available. Elder and community interviews

help provide real-life documentation of the impact of Russian contact and culture on identity, the impact on individuals and families, and feedback on what is important to people in our area and ideas for further research.

My IRB research protocol describes the interview process. No formal interview recruitment process was used; rather adults were contacted and asked if they were willing to participate in semistructured individual or group interviews. Word of mouth in our small villages and public presentations also helped raise awareness of my project. Alaska Natives from the region were the focus of these interviews and I am personally acquainted with those being interviewed. Some interviews took place at elder gatherings, but were done for the most part in a separate quiet room. Informed consent forms were signed, and a copy was given to the person being interviewed. Extreme care was taken not to make any research participants uncomfortable. The participants were informed of their right to request that the recording or discussion be terminated at any time.

Because of the low reading level of some of the elders who were interviewed, at times the informed consent was read aloud and explained in simple terms. Elders and others who were interviewed were accustomed to speaking in English, and translation was not necessary. In a few cases follow-up interviews were done at a later date, and the informed consent document was again reviewed. Also explained as part of the informed consent was my reason for doing this research, on both a personal and professional level.

Interviewees were given the option of remaining anonymous. Of the 26 people interviewed, six have chosen to remain anonymous; however some of those have agreed to their names being included in my thank-you acknowledgements.

During the data analysis, part of the collaboration process includes going back to key individuals to discuss how I am interpreting the data. A key question is "This is what was said and this is what I am thinking. What do you think about it?" This may also lead to more in-depth discussions. Input from my committee is also

key to data analysis. This helped alleviate preconceived ideas of what I expected and resonates with Tedlock's (1979) emphasis on dialogical anthropology.

As stated previously, after interviews are done, electronic copies of the interviews are given back to the participants in a CD-ROM format. They will then be able to share their interviews if they wish with family, schools, or traditional councils. Copies of my dissertation may be made available to the school district and local traditional councils, and it will also be available electronically.

Theoretical Framework: Effective Research

As stated above, effective research must focus on an indigenous approach that is built on mutual respect and transparency. Wilson (2009) helped me begin to understand indigenous methodologies and formulate my research philosophy. His focus on the three Rs—Respect, Reciprocity and Relationality—as the guiding light for meaningful research makes perfect sense to me.

As previously stated, respect, reciprocity, and relationality are also paramount in Kawagley's use of a tetrahedral framework that describes the human worldview as a triangulation between the natural, human, and spiritual realms. Values and traditions are in balance as humans locate themselves in relation to the other domains (Kawagley, 1995). Kawagley's framework is useful not only in looking at the relationship of the three realms but also at the process of cultural change as people strive to keep some sort of balance in their worldview and in their daily life.

The discussion of an interviewer's inside versus outside perspective is also very important when talking about effective research. As a member of the community, I have a certain level of inside knowledge about the area and its people. I also feel an added responsibility to represent what people say accurately. I personally know and respect the people I am working with and am comfortable living and working in the community I love. However, I was not born in the

community and am not indigenous, hence I will always have a certain outsider status and perspective as well. Seeing things from a new perspective can help with an understanding of things people take for granted and can add a comparative aspect. It is important to understand the insider versus outsider approach, always remembering to be respectful while keeping the door open for new perspectives.

When looking at effective research it is very important to give the proper importance to interviews and stories. Brayboy (2005) talks about stories as theory: "Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being" (p. 430). Stories and oral knowledge serve both as data and guidance. Stories are moral tools with implications reminding individuals of the right path. Stories are the way culture and knowledge are transmitted, reminding people of their origins (p. 439-440).

Thus stories become a theory that can express peoples' ontology, epistemology, and axiology. They reveal peoples' perspectives. I would also go on to say that as change occurs, the traditional stories can serve as a root system to help anchor an individual and culture to what is important and what needs to be passed down.

Brayboy (2005) also talks about the adaptability of indigenous individuals and groups. "Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups" (p. 429). This way of looking at indigenous individuals and groups recognizes their differences and honors their adaptability. Culture, knowledge, power, beliefs, thoughts, philosophies, customs, and traditions serve as a foundation from which to analyze practices and experiences of indigenous peoples and can serve as a framework to view experiences (pp. 437-438).

Theoretical Framework: Analysis

The analyses of the interview data illustrate some trends helping to formulate a theoretical methodology that explains the data, makes it meaningful, and provides a model applicable across broader contexts. In developing my own theoretical methodology framework I found elements of some Western concepts to be useful, including syncretism, transculturation, cultural resiliency, and constructivism. In this section I will discuss the components of these Western theoretical frameworks, which can be applicable to an indigenous framework; however, they do not completely explain indigenous cultural or identity adaptation.

One theoretical approach that helps explain cultural contact in the middle Kuskokwim is syncretism. Syncretism is an anthropological theory that describes the way divergent cultures come together, borrow from one another and in essence create their own hybrid. This fusion produces a new version that bridges the gap between the old and the new.

Although there has been some debate that syncretism is a pejorative term that expresses contempt for mixture and presupposes notions of purity in the traditions that are combined (Stewart, 1999, pp. 40-41), I believe that it is a very helpful concept to explain the blending and acceptance of the new hybrid of culture and religion that still exists today.

Cultures are porous and are open to intermixture with other different cultures. They are subject to historical and political events. It is part of their nature to change in a continual hybridization. Thus syncretism is not a transient stage but a recurrent process. To implement the theory of syncretism we need to use a broad definition as the combination of elements from two or more different traditions within a specified frame (Stewart, 1999, p. 41, 58).

In the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska the merging of Yup'ik and Athabascan cultures along with Russian contact resulted in a unique blending and syncretism of culture and identity. The amalgamation of the different religions and cultures, both in precontact times between the Yup'ik and Athabascan cultures and

later with the influx of the Russians, produced a blended culture and religion that has endured to present times. Syncretism occurs when distinct cultures come together and borrow things from one another. The resulting blend fits the situation better than either of the parts.

Thus syncretism can be seen in the actions of the Creoles who served as cultural brokers between indigenous and Russian cultures. Just as the Creoles sometimes served as cultural brokers, the syncretism of cultural traits provides the same mediating approach that blended the two cultures together.

Syncretism is more than a theoretical framework for change, but also helps explain adaptation as cultures interact. "Syncretism is never a simple borrowing of foreign elements; rather it is an adaptation process with the selection, interpretation, and incorporation of culturally specific and meaningful constituents" (DeHass, 2009, p. 26). Black (1994) sees syncretism as a universal response. "This tendency toward syncretism appears to be a universal human social response to changing ecological conditions during times of inter-group contact" (p. 214). Through syncretism cultural change becomes more manageable and less traumatic. "In other words, syncretism allows for the maintenance of continuity with the old, and facilitates the emergence of the new, in order to help humans cope with changes that have transpired" (DeHass, 2009, p. 30).

DeHass (2009) also describes how syncretism relates to identity. "Syncretism also allows for the self-positioning of the participants due to the flexibility of the process and thus the interpretation and re-interpretation of self-identity" (p. 30). Thus "syncretism helps to integrate different cultural elements. . . . [T]he definition of self-identity often involves strategic interpretation and expressions of momentarily and contextually chosen elements of the culture" (pp. 30-31).

One of the most common uses of syncretism is to apply it to religious beliefs. Religious syncretism exhibits blending of two or more religious belief systems into a new system, or the incorporation into a religious tradition of beliefs from unrelated

traditions. This can happen in areas where multiple religious traditions exist in proximity and function actively in the culture, or when a culture is conquered and the conquerors bring in new religious beliefs but do not succeed in entirely eradicating the old beliefs and practices. The new heterogeneous religion then takes a shape of its own ("Leaps of Faith," 2012).

Perhaps one of the most evident instances of syncretism in the middle Kuskokwim occurred in the fusion of indigenous beliefs with that of the Russian Orthodox Church. Black (1994) says that the transformation of the introduced Christian tradition, in this case the adjustment of Russian Orthodox practices to those of the Yup'ik, illustrates the continuity from aboriginal precontact tradition and worldview to the present (p. 215). The adaption of the Russian Orthodox religion to the local context occurred in part because the day-to-day operation of the church was initially often left to the local indigenous converts. Even today we see that the Orthodox religion in the middle Kuskokwim blends traditional beliefs with Orthodoxy.

From my previous discussion of theories and concepts, we can also look to transculturation to help understand how individuals move between cultures. Transculturation is a form of syncretism where cultures are shared rather than being segmented at different times. Transculturation describes the continuous two-way borrowing and learning between cultures that gets internalized, creating a new cultural phenomenon. "The focus is on the individual and the dynamics of choice in shaping identity" (Schneider, 2002, p. 175).

[P]eople move beyond historical labels of new culture to new identities that they actively create and from which they derive meaning. . . . Transcultural patterning reflects the active role of individuals as both inheritors of identity and conscious shapers of new identities. (Schneider, 2002, p. 8)

Transcultural refers to the incorporation of different cultural ways that get internalized as personal ways of being. Transculturation is not just the transition

from one culture to another; it is not acculturation or deculturation. Rather, it merges these concepts and creates a new cultural phenomenon. Thus transculturation is a form of syncretism.

Boraas and Leggertt (2013) describe the “indigenization” of Orthodoxy in the Dena’ina area, which borders the middle Kuskokwim region. “Orthodoxy was highly indigenized, to the point that, during the nineteenth century, an imbalanced syncretism emerged . . . in which Orthodoxy was incorporated into indigenous beliefs rather than indigenous beliefs subsumed into Orthodoxy” (p. 487). The Dena’ina converted Orthodoxy to their traditional way of thinking, relating church teachings to traditional beliefs in such areas as burials and ceremonies. They viewed Orthodoxy in their own spiritual terms, thereby asserting spiritual sovereignty (Boraas and Leggertt, 2013, pp. 497-500).

As people define their identity they are drawing upon this blended past. Lines are blurred between traditional beliefs and culture and Russian influence. What is defined as Russian has been strongly influenced by Yup’ik and what is defined as Yup’ik has been strongly influenced by Russian. This blending of culture and religious beliefs carries over to the present time.

Recently, resiliency has come to the forefront as a theoretical approach to help explain cultural adaptation and survival. The premise of cultural resiliency can be used when looking at the long history of people coming into the lives and cultures of indigenous peoples and how individuals and societies have endured and responded to changing conditions.

Cultural resilience considers how cultural background (i.e., culture, cultural values, language, customs, norms) helps individuals and communities overcome adversity. The notion of cultural resilience suggests that individuals and communities can deal with and overcome adversity not just based on individual characteristics alone, but also from the support of larger sociocultural factors. . . . Culturally focused resilient adaptation contends that adaptation to adversity is a dynamic rather than static process that includes

character traits, a person's cultural background, values, and supportive aspects of the sociocultural environment. (Clauss-Ehlers, 2013)

A resilient culture can maintain and develop cultural identity, knowledge and practices despite challenges and difficulties. Cultural resilience is the capacity of a system to continually change, adapt, and continue to develop, yet remain within critical thresholds. For a society this can take the form of an ability to deal with political uncertainty or natural disasters that is sustainable over the long term. Change can be gradual or occur quickly, and it is how a society adapts to and shapes change that is part of the study of resiliency. Thus resiliency takes the form of positive adaptation despite adversity. It is this adversity that differentiates resilience from normal development (Fleming and Ledogar, 2008; "Resilience," 2013).

Grossman and Parker (2012) also describe this cultural resiliency in terms of ties to the land:

Indigenous people can be viewed as the most historically adaptable and resilient, because of traditional ecological knowledge, political sovereignty, and community ties. . . . Survival as Indigenous peoples over the years of contact with European explorers and subsequent colonization, urbanization, and industrialization has depended upon the ability to remain connected to the land. These connections have served as a wellspring of spiritual energy and have linked Native peoples to the ancestors. These links provide a body of knowledge that defines who Native peoples are in the cosmos and how to structure daily lives in order to survive. (pp. 15, 18-19)

With the many changes brought by the 20th century, there are many examples of the cultural resiliency adaptation to the new economics. One of the most evident is the seasonal work that many Native men have found. As stated previously, after the sale of Alaska, many more outsiders flooded into Alaska. In addition to the ongoing fur trade, that meant the need for labor in mining,

construction, reindeer herding, and cutting wood for steamboats. There was also a need for locals who could help guide those boats up the rivers, and there were jobs in the canning industry. Many of those jobs were short term, but more than just the menial labor aspect of the jobs, many found pride in their expertise. As previously stated the Demientieff family was recruited from Kolmakovskiy to Holy Cross for expert carpentry work. Elders still talk proudly about their fathers who worked with the reindeer or helped out in the mining camps. Some men were also well known for their skilled trapping and women were well known for their skin sewing abilities. Even to this day, a skilled local barge captain who knows the river is an important asset to companies who still ship goods via the river. Thus one's skills become an important part of identity.

Some researchers have argued that resilience is a process, not a trait. It is not enough to identify protective factors; these factors must initiate certain processes in the individual. These processes include building a positive self-image, reducing the effect of the risk factors, and breaking a negative cycle and opening up new opportunities for the individual. Some researchers also distinguish resilience as a character trait, as opposed to resiliency, which is a dynamic developmental process (Fleming and Ledogar, 2008, pp. 8-10).

Two major risk factors have been identified as having significant effects on cultural resilience in indigenous communities: racism and historical loss or trauma (Fleming and Ledogar, 2008, p. 13-14). Both of these risk factors are very much evident in looking at the history of the middle Kuskokwim region. Two examples include the racism felt especially after the sale of Alaska and the historical trauma from devastating epidemics.

Constructivist grounded theory is another Western approach that includes elements that are applicable to my research. The aspect of constructivist grounded theory that is most interesting to me is that the relationship between the researcher and the participant is an important aspect in the research. This research paradigm denies the existence of an objective reality. Instead, the world consists of multiple

individual realities influenced by context. The researcher places value on the participant as a contributor to the reconstruction of the final model. The researcher is kept close to the participants by keeping their words intact in the process of analysis (Mills, Bonner, and Francis, 2006).

Charmaz (2008) stresses that the constructionist approach assumes that there can be multiple realities that are constructed under particular conditions; the research process emerges from interaction, taking into account the researcher and the research participants; and the data are created by the researcher and the researched as a product of the research process, not simply observed objects of it.

Social constructionists disavow the idea that researchers can or will begin their studies without prior knowledge and theories about their topics. Rather . . . constructionists advocate recognizing prior knowledge and theoretical preconceptions and subjecting them to rigorous scrutiny. (Charmaz, 2008, p. 402)

Wilson (2009) says that “constructivism takes the ontology of a fluid reality one step further in the belief that there is not merely one fluid reality, but many realities specific to the people and locations that hold them” (p. 37). He also stresses that the goal of research is the change that knowledge brings about, and what makes it worthy is to improve the reality of the research participants.

In developing my own theoretical framework, I found some elements of western approaches, as discussed above, to be useful when looking at change. However, my indigenous framework also includes elements that are not usually considered to be a part of Western theory. Through all of the changes that indigenous cultures have endured, cultural identity and values were at the core of their survival. The importance of place, ancestral relationships, and balance between the natural, spiritual, and human realms helped anchor people throughout the generations. Where my research in middle Kuskokwim identity diverges from

other work has been the focus on this indigenous rootedness.¹³ The indigenous identity framework will be discussed further in chapter 7.

How we look at culture also becomes significant. Goodenough (2003) sees culture as multiple responses to issues or events. Different segments of the population respond differently, but all share an understanding of the common ways. Customs and institutions are not only interconnected, but also the understanding of some is dependent on the understanding of others. Culture is compared to a language, not only in what people say but in what they need to know to communicate acceptably with one another. Goodenough's definition of culture consists of criteria for categorizing phenomena as meaningful stimuli, deciding what can be, deciding how one feels about things (preferences and values), deciding what to do about things, deciding how to go about doing things, and the skills needed to perform acceptably. No two people have exactly the same criteria or exactly the same understanding of what they perceive to be the expectations; however, they have the sense that they share their knowledge and understandings and therefore have a common culture. Thus cultural evolution and cultural change is better understood as individuals' understandings of their society's culture change through time. Change is adaptive but can also be the successful solution to a problem. Goodenough concluded that a community's cultural makeup as a whole was not the basic unit of cultural evolution. Rather, how to do things become relatively distinct traditions as they are passed down across generations and form the main units of cultural evolution and change. Religion also becomes a functional category; hence the ethnographic description of a people's religious life requires examining all of their institutions and customary practices with an eye to how they function religiously, if at all, and for whom (pp. 4-9).

¹³ In my April 2013 interview with Father Michael Oleksa, he stated that the Orthodox Church has survived "with this indigenous, this rootedness." From that I have coined the term "indigenous rootedness," which I have used throughout my thesis.

Goodenough's description of culture as an evolution fits in well with indigenous perspectives. I especially like a metaphor used by an aboriginal elder in Australia who compared knowledge systems to a tree:

The roots represent heritage values that provide nourishment and structure. The trunk represents the traditions or rituals that endure from generation to generation, but can transform and grow over time. The leaves are the cultural practices or daily lifeways of the people, which change with the seasons and are influenced by their environment. Understanding culture as a transformative concept is essential for viewing it as a living process, which allows for inclusion of multiple identities within a cultural group. This empowers the people of a community to accept that some things change, can be shed or changed in the new context, but the enduring values at their roots must be protected, respected and nourished for the people to thrive.

(Drabek, 2012, p. 26)

Limitations of the Study

When doing any type of research, we must be mindful of the limitations of our work. For my work, some of my research shortcomings include limitations in using ethnographic and historical archival documents, limitations of people's memory, limitations of the interview process itself, preconceptions of what to expect, and my lack of indigenous language knowledge.

When examining archival documents and ethnological research studies we must look at the drawbacks of such work. Early researchers, as well as many today, although claiming objectivity and cultural neutrality, are indoctrinated into their own way of knowing.

An example of this cultural bias can be seen from the first ethnographic investigation in the middle Kuskokwim region, *Lieutenant Zagoskin's Travels in Russian American, 1842-1844*. According to Zagoskin:

The ethnography of today as a serious science does not accept as a basis for distinguishing between different clans, folktales in which this or that tribe considers itself to be descended from the dog, wolf, or raven. And truly only a gullible traveler would place any importance on these tales, when the Natives themselves recognize that they are only allegories. (Michael, 1967, p. 209)

Zagoskin's journal does provide us with a glimpse of what indigenous life was like; however, we must realize that his observation was very much influenced by his own Russian upbringing and feelings of superiority. Also, as previously noted, the early observations were to gather information on the indigenous people to serve the economic interests of the Russian American Company; hence the indigenous world view was discounted, misunderstood, and of little importance to these early travelers.

Likewise, ethnological documentation, although well meaning, also carries its own set of cultural biases. Wilson (2009) talks about the widespread and acceptable collection of "scientific data" and procurement of specimens of human remains and material goods sent to universities in the early 1900s. This included salvage research with the goal of recording the cultures of peoples who were thought to soon become extinct (p. 48-49).

Lomawaima (2000) identified the impact of this salvage ethnography on American Indian culture as follows:

Many Americans believed that Native cultures, and perhaps Native people as well, would soon be extinct given the disastrous demographic trends of the centuries since contact with Europeans. The response of the fledgling field of American anthropology was salvage ethnography, the effort to collect as much information, as many texts, and as many objects as possible as quickly as possible from the Native people. . . . Estimates are that between 1850 and 1950, 90 to 95% of all objects ever made by an Indian person ended up in a museum collection. (pp. 4-5)

Collection was often done with the goal of accumulation and preservation of a material record of the Native American romantic past that was vanishing. Native Americans have not vanished, and the artifacts and works of art serve as an important record of the past. However, often the contexts of these collections and how they were acquired are unknown. The early museum founders shared the educational goal of preserving and presenting artifacts for the public, from what they thought of as a doomed race (Krech and Hail, 1999, pp. v-vi, 11).

The most important legacy of these collections is the artifacts themselves which form a visual foundation of history. Although the method of acquiring past collections today would be objectionable, many objects have been saved from decay or destruction.

Today these collections form a material basis for knowledge of the Indian past. They comprise a record through which scholars, the public, and Native people themselves can gain access to the Native past. American Indians have used these collections not only to unlock their pasts but also to revive and celebrate their artistic expressions. (Krech and Hail, 1999, p. 19)

New legislation has also made the repatriation of human remains, and sacred and cultural objects possible. This has led to revitalization of old and new traditions and ethnic identity, providing a source of indigenous power (Krech and Hail, 1999, p. 19).

One present-day example of museum-indigenous collaboration occurred in 1997 when a group of Yup'ik elders, translators, and anthropologist Ann Fienup-Riordan from the Bethel area visited the Berlin Museum and viewed the 1880s collection of Johan Jacobsen. They were able to examine the artifacts and record what they knew of their origin and traditional use. Paul John explained the experience as follows:

Since God knew that our priests were going to brush away our culture, God evidently had our ancestral objects collected so that they would be revealed to us through a place totally unexpected, through Germany, a place underneath our home. . . . The objects in museums, our ancestral objects, are not insignificant. If we live using them as our strength, we will get closer to the ways of our ancestors. And when we are gone, our grandchildren will be able to continue to live according to the knowledge they have gained. (Fienup-Riordan, 2000, p. 272)

When using historical research there are limitations to consider. Busha and Harter (1980) list three principles to consider when conducting historical research: (1) consider the biases of the information you are working with and the biases of the historians themselves; (2) consider the factors that may have contributed to the “historical episode”; and (3) evidence should not be studied from a singular point of view (pp. 99-100).

Kaestle (1988) also identifies four key problems with using historical research methodologies: (1) confusion of correlation and causes; (2) vagueness and presentism, the tendency to interpret past events using concepts and perspectives that originated in more recent times; (3) distinction between evidence of ideas about how people should behave and evidence of how ordinary people in fact behaved; and (4) distinction between intent and consequences (pp. 69-71).

Historical research relies on archival and other documents that have been collected in the past, and as such are not controlled by the researcher who now attempts to use them. The quality of the observation and the nature of the interpretation made by the archivist can be in question. As previously stated, early archival references were often done for a specific reason, such as the advancement of trade or religion.

Anthropological collections can also be biased because of the perspective taken by the researcher. In Tedlock’s discussion of the role of narrative in dialogical

anthropology, he points out that anthropologists often insert quotations from Native speakers to illustrate a point the writer is trying to make. In the field they may have engaged in hermeneutical dialogues with the Natives, but they shift to an internal armchair dialogue when they look back at their notes, pulling out brief statements in support of their own view. Also, when quotations are inserted into text they are cut out of dialogues themselves, which puts them in an ethnological present that removes the traces of the concrete events taking place in historic time. Fragments of dialogue can turn into paraphrases taken from a longer text to which the reader does not have access. Native statements that contradict the researcher's own theories may be suppressed, or just as bad, after arriving at some of their views on the basis of Native statements in the first place, the original order is reversed (Tedlock and Mannheim, 1995, pp. 253-287). "The Native, who may have played a decisive role in the original conversation, is now reduced, in effect, to the role of confirming opinions already held by someone else" (p. 254).

Tedlock (1979) also makes reference to Malinowski who called the anthropologist and missionary a pair of inverted twins, the missionary translating the white man's point of view to the Native and the anthropologist translating the Native point of view to the Europeans. In this comparison, the purpose of the missionary starts from a single story that is supposed to apply to all mankind while the anthropologist gathers the stories of all mankind and shows that at the end of analysis that there is only one story, which the Natives were unaware of (p. 396).

Furthermore, Western ethnographers may not be able to paint the full picture of what they are observing, even if they are well meaning and aware of this different lens and worldview they have. Often ethnographers report only what can be seen. As Wilson (2009) states: The part of the ceremony that people see—like the sweat lodge, communion, or whatever—is only the period at the end of a long sentence. That is often what ethnographers focus on, perhaps because they don't have that deep understanding of the indigenous worldview (pp. 89-90).

Wilson (2009) uses a circular research paradigm of indigenous beliefs: ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology to explain the deep, ingrained indigenous knowledge and way of viewing the world that is difficult to understand by outside Western research methods. All elements of an indigenous research paradigm are interrelated and interdependent. Wilson illustrates this worldview in a circular model where beliefs are interrelated, each blending into the next and flowing from one to the other in a cyclical fashion; all parts are equal and each part affects the other parts. Ethnographers often can see only the tip of the iceberg, with little knowledge of the underlying indigenous worldview that supports what can only be superficially seen.

It is important to take a balanced approach to research. What can be added to the early historical and archaeological research in the area is the much later ethnographic work done in the mid to late 1900s, long after the original inhabitants of the region were gone. Historical research and the work of past and present ethnographers are useful in providing background knowledge of the middle Kuskokwim region and its people. Although it is very difficult, if not impossible, to find elders who know what day-to-day life was like centuries earlier, applying indigenous knowledge can provide insight into the complexities of life, heritage, and identity in the complex, culturally mixed middle Kuskokwim region.

When conducting present-day interviews, one has to consider the limitations of people's memories. There has been a lot of research on the correlation and interconnectedness of memory and identity, as discussed in the research summary in chapter 2. Gillis (1994) states that identity depends on memory and memory depends on identity. Identity is sustained by remembering, and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity. Memories help make sense of the world we live in and are revised to suit current identities (p. 3).

The fact that memories may be limited and are often clarified doesn't mean that memory is inaccurate. The process of the interview and research brings people

back to memories and details that they haven't thought about for a while. Through the interview process, people become invested in what they are communicating.

The structuring of the interview may limit the comfort level of the person being interviewed. Although the elders and community people being interviewed know the researcher, every effort has been made to have the surroundings as comfortable as possible. But it is important to note that an interview structure is a more formalized approach than just talking to people. As discussed above, I used semistructured interviews that encouraged dialogue and conversation.

My experience in the area can be a positive aspect, but care needs to be taken not to have preconceived ideas of what to expect. Interviewees may also have a preconceived notion of what I want. I have tried to keep my expectations to a minimum and all interviews were done with an open mind. Carefully listening is very important. I have found that often people shared important information that was not directly related to the question. Word-for-word transcription also allows for interviews to be more thoroughly examined.

Finally, a limitation of this research is that I am not an indigenous speaker of Yugtun or the Athabascan languages traditionally used in the region, nor of Russian. Elders are the last generation of fluent speakers of the languages of the middle Kuskokwim. Elders are accustomed to speaking in English to children and other family members, and it is hoped that cultural knowledge, even if given in English, is still a very valuable resource. No elders preferred to speak in Yugtun, hence local translation was not needed. I was able to utilize already transcribed Russian documents such as Zagoskin's *Travels* and Netsevtov's journal. Dr. Katherine Arndt at the Rasmuson library was also very helpful in translating parts of the Alaska Russian Orthodox Church archives records and the *Russian American Orthodox Messenger*.

Summary

This chapter discusses the methodology that was used to examine cultural change and adaptation along the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska during the years of Russian contact and exploration and the resulting present-day Russian identity.

The chapter outlines my personal perspective, context of the study, collaboration and research protocol, research design methodologies and data collection, theoretical frameworks for effective research and analysis, and limitations of the study.

My methodology follows my research questions: What impact did Russian explorers, traders, and Orthodox clergy have on the middle Kuskokwim River region of Alaska? How has Russian influence changed over time, and how has this Russian heritage impacted present-day cultural identity in the middle Kuskokwim? Included is the broader discussion of how people in the region define their identity and what aspects of that identity are most important to them.

Chapter 4: 20th-Century Impacts

Introduction

In order to understand indigenous identity in the middle Kuskokwim area, it is important to put it into an historical perspective. Traditional travel and intermarriage, Russian contact and the establishment of Russian trading posts, the sale of Alaska, and recent implications of the definition of Native status all influence complex layers of identity.

This chapter gives an overview of the events that helped shape life in the region, beginning with 20th century economic and social influences and continuing with the history from the late 19th century into the 20th century, including changes in economic development, missionary expansion, modern Orthodoxy, decline in use of indigenous languages, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and the Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood. The chapter concludes with a look at an Orthodox gathering in Sleetmute in the mid 1900s that brought together local Natives and the clergy.

20th Century Economic and Social Influences

The 20th century in Alaska and the middle Kuskokwim was a time of great change, deeply impacting the culture and identity of the peoples indigenous to the region. The changing face of the new Alaska brought in many more Europeans into the middle Kuskokwim region. The effect of economic and social development with the influx of American and European miners, independent traders, commercial fishing, reindeer herding, schools, government, and missionaries transformed everyday life. Impacts were felt from cinnabar and gold mining, reindeer herding, and the establishment of many local trading posts/stores. German, English, and Scandinavian immigrants moved in and added to the cultural blending of the region. Some of the most common surnames in the region, in addition to the Russian Evan,

Kameroff, Simeon, and Sergie, also include Hoffman, Morgan, Peterson, and Kvamme. This chapter takes a closer look at the impact of the twentieth century in the middle Kuskokwim.

History of the Region, Late 19th Century into the 20th Century

There are many 19th and 20th century events that shaped the history, culture and identity of the middle Kuskokwim region. This section is by no means comprehensive, but does help illustrate some of the major changes that have taken place. During my presentations at local elders conferences, I received many questions about the more recent history. I am including here this brief history as a starting point for those who may be interested in further study of the region.

Economic Development

Very quickly the lure of Alaska brought an influx of Americans and other Europeans that forever changed the economics and culture of the region. The assets of the RAC were sold to the Hutchinson, Kohl and Company, with traders operating out of Kolmakovskiy. Other independent traders also came into the area. Before the turn of the century, additional geological and exploration missions were conducted in the region. The territorial days at the end of the 19th century were a time of significant social and economic changes in western Alaska. Two industries greatly impacted the region: mining and reindeer herding.

Mining in the early 1900s brought additional Americans into the middle Kuskokwim. In 1900 prospectors from Nome stampeded to the Kuskokwim in search of gold that had been discovered along the Yellow River, which some people identified as the Aniak River. Also the village of Crooked Creek, then called Portage Village, was a Kuskokwim River stopping point for the Iditarod and Flat mining camps. By 1910, Georgetown grew to a gold rush community with 300 prospectors when gold was found along the George River and Crooked Creek. Rich quicksilver

mercury deposits were found in Red Devil in 1933. That cinnabar mine continued operation from 1939-1946 and 1952-1972 (Oswalt, 1980a, pp. 13-15).

The mining resource development brought in many new people to the area, some of whom stayed and married into the local population. It also brought an economic boom to the area with local jobs and businesses to serve the mining population.

The expansion of the Alaska Railroad to Nenana in 1923 also helped open up the region by making dog sled access to the Kuskokwim easier. The expansion of commercial fishing in the 1920s and 1930s also added to the region's economy (Oswalt, 1980a, pp. 15-16).

Another business enterprise, less well known, was reindeer. Initially, Dr. Sheldon Jackson, who believed the Eskimos of western Alaska were facing starvation, first brought a group of Siberian Chukchi herders and later Saami people to Alaska in 1894 to serve three-year herding contracts. Following that pilot effort, a larger, more permanent colony was recruited in Norway during the winter of 1898. By 1901, ten missions in Alaska owned reindeer. The period of greatest reindeer abundance was 1930-1937, with about 600,000 deer at the start of this period. The 1937 passage of the Reindeer Act restricted ownership of domestic reindeer in Alaska to Natives only and provided for the purchase of all non-Native owned deer. By 1950, only 25,000 deer were recorded. The reasons for the decline included a combination of overstocked ranges, lack of care in herding, predation by wolves, and large losses to migrating caribou (Olson, 1969; Willis, 2006).

The village of Akiak, downriver from Kalskag, was the center of the reindeer industry along the Kuskokwim. In 1932 there reportedly were 35,000 reindeer in the Akiak area, more than in any other locality in Alaska, but soon the number declined quickly to only 600 deer by 1946 (Oswalt, 1980a, p. 22).

Reindeer herds also grazed along the Aniak River and other Kuskokwim River drainages. In 1914 the Kvamme family, a family with Saami and Yup'ik roots that still lives Aniak, established a new reindeer herd. The Kvamme family took their

deer into the headwaters of the Buckstock and Aniak Rivers and established a new herding range, constructing cabins and brush corrals in an area that had never been utilized by any other herd. The Kvamme herd grazed among the high ridges and spurs along the divide between the Swift and Holitna River headwaters to the south and the Aniak, Holokuk, and Oskawalik Rivers on the north side, thus ranging from the Aniak to Stony River village areas. Reindeer herds grazed in the higher elevations during the summer and were taken to lower elevations in the winter. The family spent winters in the Napaimute area and in later years mostly between Akiak and Aniak (McAtee, 2010, pp. 28-30):

#19: My dad was a reindeer herder, but he were younger. They had reindeers in my uppa's time too. They had a corral back there in springtime. But they quit doing that because they are used to the river and they have dog team and I don't know how much meat, the dogs could eat meat all the time, but also they are hunting. And they're used to eating fish and the people eat fish most of the time, salmon, put them up for dogs and in wintertime they never run out. And my dad's time, those age group, they learned one or two summers but after that they get tired of being hungry, no fish to eat so they quit. When they quit, all the predators were helping up there. Even from UAF, their disease, they were showing them that's how I learned the different kind of flies and in the summer. . . . Anyway, at that time they have those, all of the young guys they quit. And when they quit lot of predators they come in, lots of wolves, they just knock them down. They stopped taking care of them. They scatter up in the north they were going with the caribou.

The initial success of the reindeer project also contributed to its decline, as the growth of the herds exceeded market demand. The boom-and-bust cycle of early gold mining camps, which provided a good market for reindeer meat, combined with the national economic collapse of the Great Depression greatly affected the reindeer industry as well (McAtee, 2010, p. 24).

Of course as time went on, the population of the region continued to grow. World Wars I and II brought in more outsiders. The Kuskokwim was now navigable after a deep-sea channel was found at the mouth in the early 1900s. Steamboats headed up the river, making supplies more readily available and creating more jobs as local people's knowledge of the river became important. There was also the need for wood for fuel, supplied by local woodcutters. Later, aviation also increased the means of travel, communication, and supplies. Airstrips were built and dog sleds began to phase out for mail delivery. Motorized boats traveled along the river in the summer, and snowmachines used the rivers as ice roads in the winter ("Alaska History and Cultural Studies," 2011).

Missionary Expansion

Compared to the early presence of the Russian Orthodox Church, the history of the Catholic Church and the Moravian Church in the middle Kuskokwim is rather recent. The 1880s to early 1900s was a time of new missionary efforts along the middle Kuskokwim.

Henkelman and Vitt (1985) describe the Moravians' movement into the lower part of the middle Kuskokwim River. Ogavik, a now-abandoned village below Kalskag on the Kuskokwim, seems to be the farthest east on the Kuskokwim that the Moravians established a mission. It is located about 80 miles up the river from Bethel, the primary Moravian mission site. In 1892 Moravian missionaries from Bethel moved to Ogavik and established a mission and school. From Ogavik, missions were set up at Tuluksak and other downriver villages, including Kwigalogamiut, located between Ogavik and Tuluksak (Henkelman and Vitt, 1985 p. 168).

The 1900 epidemic devastated the population of the area, and by 1905 the Moravian missionaries were reporting "that the work at Ogavik was frustrating due to the unsettled movements of the villagers and the lack of a consistent population to work with" (Henkelman and Vitt, 1985, p. 171). Also that same year a diphtheria

epidemic ravaged the villages upriver from Ogavik. In 1908 the last Moravian missionaries left, with only infrequent visits the next few years. In 1918 the Moravian buildings were dismantled and taken to Tuluksak. Henkelman and Vitt (1985) summarized the efforts in the area as follows: "The work at Ogavik was one that was enjoyed by every missionary that served there. However, it fell victim to the changes of time, epidemics and lifestyle, thus ending a significant element of early Moravian efforts in the area" (p. 173).

The influence of the Catholic Church in the middle Kuskokwim was very much tied to the Holy Cross Mission, located along the Yukon River, north of the Kuskokwim. Many of the middle Kuskokwim Catholic families had relatives that spent time at the mission. At the present time the Catholic Church is located in only two villages in the middle Kuskokwim, Kalskag and Aniak.

When Sheldon Jackson and the Protestants divided up Alaska, the Catholics were left out of the mix. However they did not see this as a restriction on establishing themselves in Alaska. The first priority of the Catholics was conversion followed closely by education, which of course aided in the conversion. In 1888 Father Robaut founded the Holy Cross mission, with the Three Sisters of St. Anne arriving in September of that year. Just four years later, in 1892, a mission house was built at Ohagamiut, on the Kuskokwim just a few miles upstream from the present village of Kalskag. In 1926 a Catholic church was built at Upper Kalskag, and at Paimiut a mission was built. Baptisms were performed in the Kalskag area as early as the 1890s. The first church was built there in 1926. Families began relocating to the present site of Kalskag in 1939. Around the mid-1950s some of the families who had been living at Ohagamiut and Paimiut moved to Upper Kalskag. Jesuit missionaries traveling out of the Holy Cross Mission had baptized these families in their original villages. In 1939 the first Catholic church in Aniak, about 30 river miles upstream from Kalskag, was built. Catholic baptisms were performed in the Aniak area long before the Catholic mission was established in 1939. Many of

Aniak's Catholic families have their Catholic roots in Holy Cross (Flanders, 1984, pp. 143-145; Renner, 2005, pp. xxiv-xxvii, 33, 317).

As stated above, in 1892 a mission house was built at Ohagamiut, on the Kuskokwim, approximately two miles upriver (east) from Kalskag. At present it is no longer settled. This was the first mission on the Kuskokwim River and served as a primary location for outreach to surrounding villages. Father Robaut began serving the mission in 1894 and resided there for long periods of time. He stated that the mission at Ohagamiut was the best field for apostolic work in the northern part of Alaska. Ohagamiut was a large settlement of over 200 people in the 1790s. By the 1840s the population was down to 61 people, probably because of the 1838-1839 smallpox epidemic. In 1880 it had a population of 130. The mission building was destroyed by fire in 1903 but a new structure was built the following year. Father Robaut continued to serve at Ohagamiut until 1916, but by that time most of the population had died in epidemics or had moved elsewhere. The 1920 census showed 92 residents. The village was occupied into the 1930s but probably abandoned during that time frame. According to one report the people left because the slough in front of the village began drying up (Oswalt, 1980a, pp. 69-70; Renner, 2005, p. 487).

Ohagamiut had the largest *qasgiq*¹⁴ along the river in historic times. Ohagamiut is still remembered through elder stories as a site for Yup'ik dancing in their large *qasgiq*. It was also a trading center and gathering place into the early 1900s.

Of all the missionary activities in the 20th century, none had greater impact on the middle Kuskokwim than the Holy Cross mission. The Holy Cross mission was

¹⁴ *Qasgiq* is a Yugtun word for men's community house. It was usually a moderately large structure in which the men of a community resided and worked. It was also used for sweatbaths, dances, and feasts (Jacobson, 1984, p. 315). It also seems to have been used as a gathering place and housing for visiting guests. It is also sometimes called a *kashim* and in the middle Kuskokwim region is pronounced like "kasivik." Oswalt (1980a) uses the term *kashee* (p. 69).

established in 1888 and named Koserefsky after the Native village. In 1912 the mission name changed to Holy Cross. The village of Koserefsky ceased to be around 1915, when the people moved to Holy Cross. Holy Cross was described as the place where interior Athabascans met the Central Yup'ik of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Holy Cross was the second Catholic mission founded in northern Alaska, the Nulato mission being founded the year before. From the Holy Cross location Catholic missionary efforts spread to the Kuskokwim (Renner, 2005, pp. 259-261).

In January 1889 the mission school had 31 students. The school grew with boarders from "all parts." By 1902 there were 42 boys and 46 girls in the school. Instruction was in English. Training for the older boys was mostly in mechanics, carpentry, shoemaking, farming, and gardening. Older girls were taught housekeeping, sewing, arts and crafts, and gardening. All were taught the basics of Catholic life. Priests and sisters fulfilled the role as doctors and nurses. They helped sick and dying during the 1900 epidemic. In 1915 a private dwelling was converted into an infirmary and in 1930 was rebuilt to serve as a hospital with two solariums for tuberculosis victims. Father Robaut died there in 1930 (Renner, 2005, pp. 259-262).

The mission had to be self reliant especially in producing the food it needed for as many as 300 people. Much of the food eaten was Native food, including berries, fowl, wild game, eels, and fish. But much was also grown in the extensive gardens and livestock. In 1909, it was referred to as the garden spot of the Yukon with 40 acres under cultivation. Throughout most of the first four decades of the 20th century the mission also had a reindeer herd to provide meat and skins for the mission's needs. By the end of the 1800s the mission also had a sawmill. In 1953 the first high school to open on the Yukon was at Holy Cross "to train leaders among the aborigines" (Renner, 2005, pp. 262-264).

In 1956 the Holy Cross Boarding School closed and moved to Copper Valley. From 1888-1956 a total of 1,457 children, 727 boys and 730 girls, had been cared

for at the mission. Priests continued to reside at the church until 1984. After that the church was served by traveling priests out of Aniak (Renner, 2005, pp. 264-265).

Many of the middle Kuskokwim elders of the current generation spent time at the Holy Cross mission. Many had very positive experiences there; others remember it as a place where their language was taken from them. There was also much competition and conflict between the Catholic and Orthodox churches, as explained in chapter 2.

Modern Orthodoxy: The Selaviq Example

As stated previously, Orthodoxy blended in well with many of the traditional beliefs of indigenous people in the Kuskokwim region. Everyday life was not changed substantially by the new religion; animals were still respected and used for food and clothing, and local church leaders conducted local services in the absence of Orthodox priests. The Russian Christmas celebration, Selaviq (also commonly spelled Slavik or Slavic) is one of the most apparent syncretistic adaptations of Orthodox beliefs and traditional beliefs. Fienup-Riordan (1990) calls Selaviq “a Yup’ik transformation of a Russian Orthodox tradition. . . . The name Selaviq derives from the Russian *slava/slavit*, meaning praise or glory” (p. 94). It is a celebration of the birth of Christ and is also sometimes referred to as Starring because of the use of a large wooden star that is carried from house to house and spun during the singing. This Orthodox Christmas tradition originated in the Ukraine and has been maintained as a unique Orthodox celebration in regions of western Russia. It is the biggest ceremonial event of the year, combining a ritual distribution, community celebration, and religious holiday. “Selaviq has placed aspects of this Slavonic tradition within a framework of Yup’ik interpretation and style to produce an event as central to the maintenance and expression of local identity as was its original” (Fienup-Riordan, 1990, p. 95). This same point was brought up in one of my interviews:

#18: And the way I think about it, I began to find out that the Russian, the Orthodox Christian teaching and the Yup'ik culture intermingled especially through the custom of having Selaviq. And I'm told that the Native people respected Christianity very much to the point that they stopped hunting or fishing when the big holidays are happening. They stop for a little while then go back to their hunting or fishing campgrounds.

I have personally hosted Selaviq at my house in Aniak for 30 years, since my daughter was baptized in the Orthodox faith. The star boy is always first to arrive and carries in the star. He brings the star to where the icons are and gets ready as the crowd follows in. When the host is ready and food is on the table, the congregation faces the star and begins singing carols, some in Yugtun, some in Russian and some in English. The star boy holds the star and spins it as the carols are sung. Another star boy makes sure the candle in front of the star is kept lit. Three readings are also done in English or Yugtun. At the end of the songs if a church leader is present he will "say a few good words," which can include reading a letter from the bishop and talking about what Selaviq and the season means. The church leader holds a candle as he is speaking and the star continues spinning. After that, while the singing and spinning are still going on, holy water is sprinkled over the food and candy. The singing then usually ends with "God Grant You Many Years" and at the conclusion "*Prasnago*"¹⁵ or "Merry Christmas" is shouted out. Following is a photo of Selaviq being celebrated at my home.

¹⁵ *Prasnago* is probably a local adaptation from the Russian "*s prazdnikom*" meaning happy holiday and "*S rozhdestvom*" for Merry Christmas.



Figure 9: Church Leader with Star Boy Spinning Selaviq Star



Figure 10: Icon on Wall in My Home

During Selaviq, besides the star, the main focal point is the house's icon box. The Yugtun word *ikuunaq* means holy pictures or icons (Jacobson, 1984, p. 163). Years ago I asked why do houses have the icons and why do the singers face the icon. I was told that the icon box represents the church house with its holy pictures that are decorated in the house like Christmas and that people face the icon for respect. I also learned that the holy icons represent the presence and participation of the saints and angels in all Orthodox services.

Father Michael Oleksa explains the importation of the Selaviq traditions from the Ukraine as an interesting phenomenon:

So many of the customs they have on the middle Kuskokwim are actually Ukrainian rather than Russian. The starring phenomenon would probably be unknown in St. Petersburg or Moscow. . . . It's always been a mystery to me how it migrated from the other side of the Russian empire to this, from their perspective, to the eastern side of the Russian empire, with very little in between. Someone had to bring that custom. I suspect that it was later, after the sale of Alaska, rather than in early times. . . . What is really unique and to me fascinating about specifically the Kuskokwim is that they have the largest repertoire of what the Ukrainians call the *Koliady* (Russian folk carols). . . . So it's not just that they know these songs but that they know more verses of

them than even the immigrant people who come from that region. So where did that all come from? And this is lost in the midst of time but this is my hunch about it. Whoever introduced them struck a cultural cord with the Kuskokwim Yup'iks that had not been struck any place else. (M. J. Oleksa, personal communication, April 2013)

Oleksa (1992) does offer a possible explanation of the origin of the folk carols and explains the synthesis that occurred:

About 1905, the only Ukrainian missionary to serve in western Alaska, Father Iakov Korchinskii, probably introduced the singing of Carpatho-Russian folk carols, *koliady*. Winter was the ancient traditional season for feasting and distributing gifts, associated with the Bladder Festival, and the Yup'ik quickly adapted the caroling customs to their own needs. In any case, the Yup'ik celebration of Selaviq, derived from the Slavonic "Slava," represents an obvious synthesis of Orthodox liturgical, Ukrainian folk, and ancient Eskimo traditions. (p. 188)

Both Oleksa (1992) and Fienup-Riordan (1990) make note of the syncretism of traditional celebrations and beliefs merging with this Orthodox Christmas celebration that come together in Selaviq, including memorial feasting, gift giving, visiting between villages, and feeding deceased relatives. It is also interesting to note that even today some of the Selaviq carols are sung in Russian. People do not know the language but sing it phonetically and resist any suggestions to change it.

They preferred the Slavonic . . . when it came to the Christmas carols, it's just the syllablization because they knew it was Christmas, something about Stars something about Kings, something about Shepherds, something about a Virgin and a Child, good enough. It didn't bother them that they didn't know word for word what, and they liked the music. They just enjoyed singing it so

much. So that saved it all, that preserved it for all these years. (M. J. Oleksa, personal communication, April 2013)

Each Orthodox village and even Anchorage celebrates Selaviq in their own way. For the most part the songs are the same but the tradition varies. Each village incorporates their own local traditions in how they celebrate Selaviq, again illustrating the personal connection and local pride in the church.

#18: Well besides Selaviqing, the Selaviq part it varies from village to village how they celebrate it. That's the biggest difference I have seen. Like for example if I compare Marshall, how they Selaviq in Marshall, and here in Kalskag, there's a big difference, a very big difference . . . Like when they are going to eat, at home they have the people wait and let the choir eat first at the first table using regular table. But when people have feeds here they eat on the floor on a big table and that's a traditional way, the Yup'ik way, of how they used to have feeds. So that's a difference I've seen. Strictness of that too, of following the star, is observed here too than at Marshall. Making comparisons, but the church services are the same, the singing are the same. They are a little different in the urban areas. Here in the village we tend to, well we have a meeting before the starrng starts and we make up our mind the way the star is going to go and stick to it. From what I'm told in the urban areas, you could go from East Anchorage all the way to the airport and drive all the way back.

Even today the independent spirit of the church is evident. Not all villages have local priests and many are visited only occasionally by traveling clergy or when they are called in for a funeral. For those villages, when a priest arrives it is a flurry of activity with church services, baptisms, communion, marriages, etc. Even during special holidays such as Easter, local church leaders are perfectly happy to conduct

their services as they have in the past. Father Michael Oleksa spoke to me about a village that had a new young priest who had to leave for a time:

They weren't sorry to have a priest, but they're just as happy to not to have one because now they can do it their way, preserve some of their local customs. And that's perfectly ok, that's the only way the church has survived with this indigenous, this rootedness . . . because so much of the ancient practices and beliefs have been respected. (M. J. Oleksa, personal communication, April 2013)

Decline in Use of Indigenous Languages

The decline in indigenous language use was directly impacted by the education system of the 20th century. As more missionaries moved in and American schools were established, English became more dominant. Missionaries and teachers discouraged and sometimes forbade the use of indigenous languages.

They discouraged that (the use of Native language) in the mission. I've heard stories from Holy Cross too there that they weren't supposed to use their local language but the sisters then would talk in French or something. . . . And of course when the kids were by themselves they would use their language but there was such a mixture there that it was harder for them to continue their language once they came to the mission. English became the common language between the Athabascan and so on. Of course that is what they insisted they use in the schools. (R. L. Collins, personal communication, May 2013)

Sheldon Jackson's education efforts in Alaska have been well documented. As stated in chapter 2, Sheldon Jackson brought in the prevailing view that the American language and culture were key to the acculturation and survival of the Alaska Natives. With the establishment of additional missions and American schools, English became the language of education and progress.

Parents who wanted their children to succeed in the new American territory often encouraged the use of English. The period of language suppression continued to have an effect into modern times as the generation whose language was forcibly suppressed grew up to raise their own children.

Generations have already been brainwashed with the notion that Native languages are inferior, disadvantageous to the children and their lives and careers . . . that it is unhealthy to overload one's brain with more than one language, or that it is impossible to speak two languages well. (Krauss, 1980, p. 77)

Although the younger generation no longer speaks their indigenous language, being multilingual was common in the past. Some of the language loss was due to the Holy Cross Mission that is discussed in this section and again in chapter 5. People also did not want their children to learn their Native language, for fear of being punished:

#16: I asked my mom and dad how come they didn't teach us Yup'ik. I guess my mom used to speak Yup'ik and Athabascan when she was little fluently but then because of school and everything she suppressed that. She's lucky she could speak it now, some, but I could understand bits and pieces or phrases that I know what it says because someone tell me what it mean. So they told me they didn't want us to be beaten like how they were beaten in school, so that's how come they didn't teach us Yup'ik.

#7: I don't remember any stories because I was kind of a lazy. My dad spoke only in Yup'ik and my mom would always translate so we never bothered to learn Yup'ik as children. My mom actually did not want us to learn Yup'ik because she thought we would get our hands slapped like she did at school. So she would translate and my dad would just listen. Some times my dad would start scolding us in Yup'ik.

Ray Collins during his time in Nikolai also questioned why children were not taught their Native language:

I remember talking to my neighbor and I wondered why he had chosen to raise his kids (using English). He said “oh well that’s their language, they’ll speak it when they want to.” That was his idea on that. They had to teach them the English, the children, but they thought that they were born with their own language and they would start speaking it when they wanted to. So there was a misunderstanding about how language is carried on too. They thought they were helping the kids by teaching them their English and they thought that they would automatically pick up their own language. But it didn’t work that way that they would grow up understanding it because they would hear it around them but they wouldn’t speak it nor were encouraged to speak it early on. (R. L. Collins, personal communication, May 2013)

The establishment of local village schools also changed the settlement pattern in many small communities. Previously whole families traveled to spring, summer, fall, and winter camps, following the food supply. With the establishment of the school, more children and mothers stayed in villages, while fathers went out trapping and hunting. There are a number of villages that came into being because a school was established. In the middle Kuskokwim region, Stony River is one such village where it wasn’t until 1960-1961 when cabins were built and lived in on a year-round basis (Oswalt, 1980a, p. 79). This cultural change was later accentuated with the establishment of boarding schools, which often took high school students out of their village for the school year.

Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA)

The law that created the territory of Alaska gave the region its first government. However, the powers dealing with natural resources, land, and money would remain with the federal government.

The Alaska Statehood Act of 1958 included language that said Congress needed to resolve Alaska Native land issues in the future. It also allowed the new state to select 103.5 million acres of land. As the state began to select more and more acres, Natives grew upset that their traditional lands for hunting and fishing were threatened. Also the discovery of oil on the North Slope increased the need to settle the land status in Alaska. In response to land concerns, the Alaska Federation of Natives was formed in 1966 and lobbied for a settlement of land claims, resulting in the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). That was followed in 1980 by ANILCA, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act ("Alaska History and Cultural Studies," 2011).

It is not my intention here to provide the complicated details of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. However, the establishment of village and Native corporations and the enrollment of Alaska Natives as shareholders had a profound impact on how people defined their status as Alaska Natives.

All living Alaska Natives born on or before December 18, 1971, when ANCSA became law, with proof of one-fourth Alaska Native blood were eligible to become shareholders in the regional and village corporations, entitling them to dividends as corporations became profitable. It is important to look beyond the financial aspects of being a member of a village or Native corporation. Land was also transferred to village and regional corporations, and beyond its financial value is the cultural value of place. ANCSA added to the regional cultural identity and village cultural identity as these groups worked together to select land and set up businesses and programs (Arnold, 1978).

Prior to the passage of ANCSA, Alaska was roughly divided into twelve geographic regions, with each one forming its own Native association to pursue a land claims settlement . . . delineated generally along the boundaries of the different Alaska Native cultures. (Pullar, 2013, p. 405)

Thus ANCSA helped solidify a cultural identity based on the newly formed corporations. The corporations served as a new vehicle for Native identification, with shareholders who had the right to own stock and benefit financially from the earnings.

Statewide, including the middle Kuskokwim region, ANCSA established village corporations for the villages of the area. The 11 villages of the middle Kuskokwim, along with 45 others, are members of the regional Calista Corporation. In 1977, 10 ANCSA village corporations of the middle Kuskokwim region merged into The Kuskokwim Corporation (TKC). Merged were the village corporations of Lower Kalskag, Upper Kalskag, Aniak, Chuathbaluk, Napaimuit, Crooked Creek, Georgetown, Red Devil, Sleetmute, and Stony River. The idea of The Kuskokwim Corporation was to create one corporation, with less operating expenses and more combined capital, land, and resources (“Kuskokwim Corporation,” 2013). Also formed was the Kuskokwim Native Association (KNA), a nonprofit entity to help provide services to the same region, with the addition of Lime Village and Russian Mission. KNA’s office is located in Aniak. TKC has their main office in Anchorage with a small one-person branch office in Aniak.

Enrollment under ANCSA is also mentioned in chapter 2. The idea of blood quantum was not a new concept in 1971, but its implementation in determining who was eligible for enrollment in essence was the deciding factor of who was and was not Alaska Native. The pressure to document Native blood was powerful. Gordon Pullar in his discussion of Creole, Russian, and Native heritage on Kodiak Island addresses some of the complicated relationships and identity issues after ANCSA when people began to take a closer look at their heritage (Pullar, 2013). The blood quantum issue was also brought up several times in my interviews.

Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB or CIB)

In addition to the “Native” designation proven through the degree of Indian blood for enrollment as an Alaska Native under ANCSA, the issuance of the

Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) also uses blood quantum to prove “Indianess.” The CDIB is an official U.S. document that certifies an individual possesses a specific degree of Native American blood. The CDIB is often shortened to CIB when people are talking about this document. The Bureau of Indian Affairs issues the CIB after the applicant supplies a complete genealogy with supporting legal documents, such as a birth certificate. This does not mean that an individual qualifies for membership in a specific tribe, but rather is a more general eligibility for services (“Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood,” 2013).

The CIB, based on degree of Indian blood, has become an important identifying document for any services administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs or the Indian Health Service. In Alaska the holder of a CIB card is eligible for free health care as well as educational funding such as scholarships. Here again, Native “identity” is determined by blood quantum. And the proof of this identity directly relates to services received. Although a CIB card or tribal identity card is required for services, there is no longer a specific blood quantum requirement, such as one-fourth, although from talking with people, some still believe one-fourth Native blood is needed for eligibility.

The determination of percentage of Indian blood, after the passage of ANCSA, in essence has served as a baseline for all future CIBs. The percent of Native blood documented for those Alaska Natives born on or before December 18, 1971, is used for any descendant’s blood quantum verification.

As stated previously, the percentage of Indian blood was brought up several times by individuals when describing their Native identity. More will be discussed on this topic in chapters 5 and 6 as I summarize common interview themes and look at issues of identity.

A Snapshot in Time

Even as rapid changes continued into the 20th century, the Orthodox Church remained strong. Still today, visits by the bishop to Orthodox villages in Alaska are a special event. I was in Aniak several years ago when the bishop visited and people from throughout the region attended. Such an event occurred in Sleetmute in 1956. Elders from the region remember the visit.

One of the elders I interviewed identified himself in a 1956 photo with Bishop Ambrose (Amvrossy, Amvrosii) and remembered his visit. He remembers coming down river from his grandfather's place for a funeral and seeing the bishop. It was a special event because he said the bishop was Russian.

According to church records Bishop Amvrossy (Merejko) served as bishop of Sitka and Alaska from 1955-1967. He was born in Kiev in 1889 and arrived in the United States in the 1930s. He served as a priest in New York and New Jersey. In 1955 he was consecrated bishop of Sitka and Alaska, where he served until 1967 when he was transferred back to the states as archbishop of Pittsburg and West Virginia. Although Bishop Amvrossy clearly had experience in English-speaking parishes before his arrival in Alaska, his biography states that he "became disillusioned by the increased use of English instead of Church Slavonic during services and other changes in practices of the Church" ("Amvrossy (Merejko) of Pittsburg," 2013). Therefore it does seem likely that he would have addressed the group in Sleetmute in Russian

From a report in the *Russian American Orthodox Messenger* regarding his trip to Sleetmute, Bishop Amvrosii states:

On Saturday [September 1] I set out for the next settlement. . . . On the evening of the same day I celebrated all-night vigil and on Sunday the 2nd, liturgy and distributed icons. There are 100 parishioners there. In Sleetmiut I met a Russian Orthodox man—Sergei Andreianov, 85 years old—a descendant of the Russian immigrants of those times when Russia still owned Alaska. It was pleasant to converse with him, a person who has

preserved the pure Russian language, the Orthodox faith, and many historical traditions. (Amvrosii, 1956)

As stated previously, Russian translation was sometimes problematic. Matfe Donlan was traveling with Bishop Ambrose as a translator. Matfe and his wife were both identified in the 1956 Sleetmute photo. One of the elders I interviewed stated:

#6: He was talking to these guys, that priest, you know I was just thinking, because my Grandpa was telling me, that's a priest, a translator, was not translating the way it supposed to be. You skipping some things, he was because he knew what he was talking. He was telling me about the priest was taking short cuts. Ya this guy was a Russian priest, he came in with the bishop, a translator ya, but he wasn't translating the way he was supposed to. My grandpa told me in Russian. That's what I remember about it.

Other elders also remember Matfe Donlin, and tidbits of his life made for interesting conversation:

#22: He was a . . . church warden. I don't ever remember him as a priest, but he used to come around and you know have service and you know, have service and talk about the bible and choir singer with them. He traveled in the villages. Ya I don't know anybody say he was a priest. No but he travel and have service in our church and he talk about the bible and the people you know, believe in God and say your prayers. I think that's him. I think he used to live in Crooked Creek for awhile and Sleetmute for awhile and I don't know where else. He never stayed in one place as a resident, this guy.

#23: I know they say Matfe Donlin is our Russian Orthodox priest. And he had a wife. His wife left him because he want too much home brew. . . . When I come to myself, when I find out he's a Russian Orthodox, I see him serving. They let him close down his job because he want to drink too much home

brew whatever he's making. They separated. His wife separate from him and she move up to, they said she move to McGrath. That's all I know. I guess I saw her only one time. . . . He was still helping us even he's not serving, like Russian Orthodox giving communion. I never see him. Before his wife go I used to see him serving. He was in Sleetmute for I don't know how long. Not too long. [After his wife left] he stopped serving but he still be helping people you know like during Selaviq time, Easter time he lead people.

Also part of the 1956 gathering in Sleetmute were many of the Orthodox faithful from Sleetmute and the surrounding area. Women wore scarfs, as was the custom in church, and men were dressed in their best suits, if they had them, with any Russian medals they may have owned. Chief Mishka Simeon was also a prominent figure in the photo and in the village:

#22: Uppa Chief, Simeon, Mishka Simeon, he was a chief for a long time. He was a good chief, a good leader, everybody respected him. Chief of the whole village, Sleetmute. And he also was a deacon or something in the church, this guy, Mishka Simeon.

Perhaps two of the most interesting figures present for the bishop's visit were two individuals known throughout the region as shamans, Gleman Esai from Nikolai and Medicine Man Makila from Stony River.

Whenever local shamans (*angalkuq*) are discussed, it is usually with some trepidation. Accounts vary, as was the case when discussing Gleman Esai and Makila:

#22: Gleman was a friendly *angalkuq*. He does not go on and you know curse people, this one did. This one [Makila] was dangerous. One day when he came to the village, all the girls run away and hide from him. We was so scared of him. One day he was coming up the path and I was looking out the window and as he get out of the boat, I see a fish jump, I don't know a

grayling or something, I got so scared I ran to my mom, “Mom, mom, here comes *angalkuq* he’s trying to do something to us. A fish jump only one time.” I thought he was going to do something. . . . All the time I been around I never heard people be afraid of him [Glemen] This one [Makila] they were afraid of him, very afraid of him.

The [leg] infection wouldn’t clear up and finally the shaman, Gleman, was brought in and treated it with medicine and it cleared up. So he was involved in the use of some traditional medicines and things too as well as believed to be a shaman. [Question: Was he feared?] He was and he played on that. They kind of kept him at a distance you know. But he came around and was one of the earlier ones that came to visit us and he even sang some songs for me. . . . He was the last one that would really treat people and so on and recognized for that. He didn’t talk to me about shamanism. I got most of the information from his son and others. . . . I trapped with his son out there and he told me he prayed that he would not get that. He felt or they felt that the shamanism or that power was something that came on you. You didn’t choose it; it chose you. And he knew his dad had that and he didn’t want that and he told me that he prayed that he wouldn’t get that. So he recognized that in the family and he was involved in some of the healings up there. (R. L. Collins, personal communication, May 2013)

Yet others described Gleman Esai as one to be feared:

People feared Gleman. He was from Nikolai, little tiny guy, five foot two, five foot three, big ears. I remember that. I saw him land in Sleetmute and grown men...they ran down and helped steady his boat. They were so afraid of him, they just didn’t want to piss him off. They treated him, if they had a red carpet, they would have rolled it out. It was like that because they were afraid of Gleman. He was not a nice man. (Jerabek, 2005, p. 40)

Medicine Man Makila was also described to me when I was doing research for my master's on the life of Gusty Michael, who was the son of Makila. One of Makila's grandsons, now an elder himself, remembers his grandfather's healing powers:

No he's not a medicine man [Gusty]. He's not, only his dad, not him. My dad's dad [Makila]. He sing and cover up with a shirt like this, and sing, and make a little dance and see what's going on. He said somebody get sick. He make medicine. He fix them. He sees what's going on and take the germs off, with the medicine. Nothing wrong, he fix them. I used to watch him, my old grandpa. He dance, he sing same time, he go round, he do like this, he see what's going on, what's happened, something going on, he say, something bothering us, another medicine man, he see it, as soon as he come around, he start to sing and see what's going on. He used to make medicine. He help lot of people too, somebody get sick. Makila, Michael. (Jerabek, 2005, p. 36)

Oral narratives are an important part of the history of the middle Kuskokwim. An event, such as the 1956 visit of Bishop Ambrose (Amvrossy, Amvrosii) can spark stories of the event and the people involved. These stories give us a glimpse of personal interactions and what life was like just a generation ago.

Summary

Understanding the region's history is important as we look at identity in the middle Kuskokwim. Reframing identity from a local perspective involves the examination of complex layers of identity influenced by indigenous and non-indigenous interaction through historical events. Through this historical perspective we can see how changing times and events shape personal as well as local history. In this chapter my goal was to provide an overview of events that helped shape life and identity in the region. Chapters 5 and 6 include discussions around the common

themes found in the interviews using interviewee's own words, voicing resonant narratives, with theoretical analysis, leading to a framework for identity in the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska.

Chapter 5: Analysis of Interview Data, Russian Heritage and Indigenous Identity

Introduction

As stated in chapter 3, I interviewed 26 individuals from 2012 to 2013. Groups include two sisters and their cousin, another group of two co-workers, and a third group of three co-workers; otherwise the interviews were individual. Two of the individuals interviewed were not Alaska Native but were interviewed because of their knowledge of Russian influence on the Kuskokwim. Of the Alaska Natives interviewed, all were from the region, 20 women and four men. Two were in their 80s, three in their 70s, five in their 60s, ten in their 50s, one in their 40s, and three less than 40 years.

Open-ended, semistructured interviews focused around people's heritage, which included Yup'ik, Athabascan, Russian, and other European ancestry. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, from which shared topics were identified. Chapters 5 and 6 include discussions around the common themes found in the interviews using the interviewees' own words, voicing resonant narratives, with theoretical analysis, leading to a framework for identity in the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska.

All names have been removed from the interviews. For instance if a person mentioned a relative by name, I substituted the relationship for the name, such as "Bob" may have become "my brother." Otherwise all interviews are verbatim. Numbers are used for all interviewee's names. When I have asked a specific question you will see my initials, CJ.

As previously stated, my research is done using an ethnohistorical approach that combines the use of historical documentation as well as people's oral history. The guiding light for my research is built around Wilson's three Rs, respect, reciprocity, and relationality (Wilson, 2009). Tedlock (1979) emphasizes

recognizing the voice of those being interviewed as a critical part of any study and keeping an open dialogue with those who have provided us information.

Chapter 5 includes interview questions that center on Russian heritage and indigenous identity. In talking about Russian heritage, people were asked if they had Russian ancestors and how they were related, how did they find out about their Russian ancestry, what was their life like, how did they feel about their Russian ancestry, if their children knew about their ancestry, and what was important to pass down to them.

From those and other open-ended questions, the following themes are identified as being important components of identity. Each one of the themes includes key narratives. The themes discussed in Chapter 5 include:

- Blending of indigenous Native groups in the area, principally Yup'ik and Athabascan
- Blending of Catholicism and Orthodoxy in many families
- Influence of the Holy Cross Catholic mission
- Physical characteristics that often identified Russian ancestry
- Importance of maintenance of the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian prayer and song books, building of churches, practicing Orthodox religion

Before I address the narratives associated with the topics I have identified, it is helpful to look at a general discussion of Russian heritage in the middle Kuskokwim region, how people feel about their Russian ancestry, and if and how they have shared that information with their children.

Discussion of Russian Heritage

In looking at the data collected during the interviews it is revealing to consider how indigenous values are expressed as part of people's identity. As referenced in chapter 2, knowledge of ancestry is a necessary condition to ethnic identity. An individual with more than one heritage may choose to identify with one,

none, or a combination of heritages. Mixed blood is sometimes used to describe a mixed heritage and the association with blood quantum has special meaning for indigenous Americans (Sprott, 1994, p. 312).

Remembering ancestors is an important part of indigenous value systems. The place you are from and sharing your kinship is the beginning part of the discussion when you meet someone, which helps establish interrelationships as part of your identity. In a more formal setting, telling an audience who your parents and grandparents are has also become the standard way of self-introduction.

In recent years, Alaska's indigenous peoples have compiled written lists of values for the culture of their particular region. The following list of cultural values is a summary of those listed on the Alaska Native Knowledge Network for the Yup'ik and Athabascan peoples (*Athabascan Cultural Values*, 2013; *Yup'ik Cultural Values*, 2013).

Self-Sufficiency and Hard Work	Care and Provision for Family
Family Relations and Unity	Love for Children
Cooperation	Honesty and Fairness
Humor	Sharing and Caring
Respect for Elders and Others	Respect for Land and Nature
Practice of Native Traditions	Honoring Ancestors
Knowledge of Family Tree	Spirituality
Family Roles	Humility
Knowledge of Language	Avoid Conflict
Respect for Knowledge	Wisdom from Life Experiences

Although it is difficult to know exactly what worldview and culture the Russians encountered when they entered the middle Kuskokwim River region, I assume that many of the above values were present, as evidenced in oral tradition. As people talk about their identity, many of the indigenous values listed above

become evident, as does the impact of the Russian influence. These values will be examined as the interview themes are discussed.

As stated previously, the initial Russian incursion was a time of oppression and grave harm to Alaska's indigenous peoples. As the Orthodox Church became more prominent, the forced labor, slavery, and killing were greatly curtailed. By the time the Russians had an impact on the middle Kuskokwim region, they came in far less numbers and many stayed and married into the local population.

Those who were interviewed identified their Russian ancestor as their grandparent or great-grandparent, as either full or half Russian. In most cases the Russian ancestor, a male, married a local woman of Yup'ik or Athabascan descent. People knew the names of the grandparents and great-grandparents but some were not sure if they were part or full Russian. Others knew their ancestry, several generations back:

#5: My uppa, I heard he came from Sitka and he met my grandma up the Kuskokwim River by Nushagak area or Sleetmute and she was Russian.

CJ: Oh were they both part Russian or full Russian you think?

#5: Full Russian. And my dad was Russian so all the children, my sisters were Russian too.

One elder stated that he had traced his ancestry back to Russia:

#6: Ya I used to read all the time. That's the only way I that I can find out. I found a book... I traced my ancestry way back to Siberia from there I let it go, I shouldn't have I guess.

Another family was able to create a whole family tree, mainly through the efforts of one of the children who while in college began the search and also interviewed parents and uncles, who have since died. She found the first ancestor who came over from Russia and even a letter from his mother asking to have her son sent back.

#8: He never went back and now there's thousands of us here.
The family now has its own website, newsletter and family reunions.

Some elders remember their grandparents and even their parents speaking Russian or Russian, Yugtun and/or Athabaskan; most were multilingual. Those that grew up Russian Orthodox remember strict rules on how to act in the church and at home during prayers:

#7: It influenced my life because I grew up with a real strong Russian Orthodox faith. My dad was the Russian Orthodox chief. He prayed every day. We listened to him pray in Russian and Yup'ik I think and a little bit in English. . . . My dad would have us be real quiet on Sunday while he would be talking to us in Yup'ik. He would be explaining things and sometimes we wouldn't have a break and we wouldn't get the full meaning of what he was saying. But it was so quiet in there you could hear a pin drop.

CJ: Your grandma she speak Yup'ik?

#6: Ya she speak Russian.

Visitor: And Eskimo?

#6: Ya.

Visitor: And Indian?

#6: Ya.

#5: When we pray he [my father] talk all Russian language, which Our Father in Russian way, the Lords Prayer. But I just know it [says a bit in Russian] and make the sign of the cross.

Here the use of the Russian language becomes an important vehicle for transmission of religion. Being quiet and attentive is also stressed. Being observant and quiet is an important traditional value and principal way of learning. Also

shown is the strong commitment to Orthodoxy and the importance of passing that knowledge to the children.

Russia was the first country to send explorers, fur traders, and missionaries into the middle Kuskokwim region. As discussed in chapter 4, the sale of Alaska to the United States and the subsequent reindeer herding, mining, and independent trading posts brought many people, especially men, to the area. Many of them married into the population, just as the Russians had done.

In the process of finding out about their Russian background, some also found information about mixed indigenous and European heritage. People understand the importance of knowing their diverse backgrounds:

#8: Only after we started doing all this research I thought Wow. I just always considered myself totally Athabascan and nothing else.

CJ: So you've got Russian, Yup'ik, Athabascan of course and Finnish and German.

#8: Ya, mixed up person. [laughs]

#8: My daughter did the same thing in high school. She researched her family. She tried to get information on her father's side also and with the information she found out, we found that his family was from a place called Treves Germany. But I think it's changed its name now and it's different...My father-in-law's dad . . . moved from Germany to here in the must have been 30s. . . . He didn't want to be around when there was the war.

Others also brought up other European heritage:

#7: My mom's parents. You know they have some Swedish background with reindeer herders. So I think I'm Mongolian, I mean lots of different races.

Thus Native ethnicity in the middle Kuskokwim region is diverse with the mixing of Russian and other European cultures. Adding to this is the mixture of

indigenous peoples, which is sometimes confusing to people as they try to determine “what they are.”

The “Malimiut” people came up several times. There has been much academic discussion regarding the use of Malimiut. Burch (2006) makes reference to the Malimiut people from the Kotzebue Sound region, many of whom had migrated to Norton Sound (p. 314). Ganley (1995) explains that “the Malimiut have been an enigma to scholars of Alaska’s history and anthropology” (p. 104). He describes several uses of the term:

It is also possible that the term Maligmiut [original spelling of Malimiut] was invented by the Yup’ik speakers to describe a group that is visibly mobile and engaged in commerce. During this period, proper etiquette demanded that a person from another area have a partner in the village he was visiting. Maligmiut might possibly have been used in a slightly derogatory manner to identify someone from the North who “follows” (malig-Yup’ik; malik-Inupiaq) their partner. It may also be that Maligmiut was coined to identify the major traders of the Norton Sound/Bering Sea area to all factions involved: Yup’ik, Russian, and Inupiat. (pp. 105-106)

Ganley (1995) concludes that “only from a linguistic perspective may Malimiut be an appropriate label for a distinct dialect of Inupiat. The term is inappropriate when used to designate ‘societies’ other than that of Unalakleet” (p. 112).

According to Yup’ik professor Dr. Theresa John:

This cultural identification terminology refers to specific Inupiat group. If I was to write it in current writing system it would be Malimiut in Yugtun and not Inupiaq. I know that when our Elders tell stories about our northern neighbors they use special region Malimiut. (T. John, personal communication, November 2013)

All of my interviewees are from the middle Kuskokwim river and thus when using the term Malimiut, they are referring to northern people. In the references to the northern Malimiut people below, one person mentions the Barrow area and another mentions Cape Nome.

In several of the interviews Malimiut is used to describe the relationship tied to a particular place, northern Alaska. In the first examples, the people interviewed had specific knowledge of the place their relative came from. In the second example, the person has heard the term in reference to their ancestors but is not sure what it means or where her ancestors originated:

#12a: Yes she [my grandmother] married a guy from Barrow area. He always told my mom and other people that he was a Malimiut, and you've heard of those, right. He always said he was a Malimiut.

#19: My mom was half Russian and Malimiut, Northern Eskimo. . . . my mom's dad she was Malimiut Inupiaq, he was born in Cape Nome.

#1b: Long time ago they used to say that we're, our ancestors were Malimiut. You ever hear that? I don't know what Malimiut was, maybe it's Russian, I don't know. Malimiut they used to call. They say it was a tribe of really fierce people, so I guess now days since we were so fierce back then, we try not to be today. [laugh]

The uncertainty about where ancestors came from was also a common topic when asked about how or why their Russian ancestor came into the region. When I asked, "How did your Russian ancestor come into the region?" some families, as stated above, could trace their Russian ancestry. Others were unsure, and a couple of interesting stories emerged:

#17: I think he ran away from the Russian army, if I'm right. I may be wrong but, when the United States bought Russia cause it's very close from Dillingham to McGrath to walk over, that way.

[This possible connection to the Russian army will be further discussed in chapter 6.]

#1c: So whenever I saw people from upriver, I would ask them questions about our family and who was my mom's mother and who was her family and all that and how we are all related. . . . I asked him well "Where did my grandfather come from?" "We don't know. He just showed up. We know he's Russian."

Also of interest to me was to try to find out after their Russian ancestor arrived, how he got together with his Native wife. When I asked, "Do you have any idea how your grandparents got together, how he ended up marrying a Native woman?" again many people were not sure, but some talked of the tradition of arranged marriages:

#2: There were some stories, most of them say like forced or if that Russian is treating the lady good, that's the husband to be.

#14: A long time ago they never knew each other. The parents made decisions on who their son would marry or who their daughter would marry and sometime they would just see them for the first time and never know nothing about them. And that's how they married long ago. It wasn't by choice.

#12b: I never seen them before and here they get married. The parents choose for them. Long ago the parents used to choose man and women. Maybe some men used to have two, three womens.

Although the case of several wives was brought up, this was probably in reference to indigenous unions. The Russians were very strict about monogamy, which was at times in conflict with the indigenous way of life. As discussed in chapter 2, Nichols and Croskey (1972) stated that the death of Iuvenalii was probably due at least in part to his prohibition of polygamy (p. 43). However, in the

early years even polygamy was tolerated if the marriages were contracted before baptism (Black, 2004, p. 230).

Znamenski (1996) also states that for the Tanaina (Dena'ina), the acceptance of the formal and ritual side of Orthodoxy did not mean the total embracing of the Russian Church:

The Indians seem mostly to have absorbed certain rituals which matched traditional practice. At the same time, they rejected norms that contradicted their worldview. Thus, missionaries despite their insistent efforts, could not impose their rigid Christian marriage policy on the Indians. (p. 36)

The marriage practices of the Dena'ina were rather flexible and sometimes included polygamy. Znamenski (1996) states that the Church closed its eyes to this inconsistency (p. 36). This is an instance where the teachings of the Church were in conflict with traditional lifestyles but were basically ignored, at least in the early years of the Church.

People were also asked if they knew anything about how their Russian ancestors lived. Most said they were just “regular guys” who followed the game, hunted, fished, and trapped. (Although much less frequent, trapping continues to be a source of income even into modern times.) A few of the Russian ancestors were store or trading post owners who also traded for furs. One cannot help but think that this could be a carryover from Russian trading activities and post management in the 1800s. One family's Russian great-grandfather was actually the last manager of Kolmakovskiy Redoubt, who then continued to work there and later at Vinasale, near McGrath, under the American company that was the precursor to the present-day Alaska Commercial Company.

As stated in chapter 2, many researchers point to the fact that “Russians” who came to Alaska were in fact Native Siberians (M. J. Oleksa, personal communication, April 2013; Znamenski, 1998). It is also important to note that the first reindeer herders, in the 1890s before the Sami, were the indigenous Siberian

Chukchi (Willis, 2006). One of my interviewees stated that her father might have been from Siberia:

#14: My dad always talked about Siberia. He would talk about that someday he would like to go back to Siberia. . . . My dad spoke a language that nobody could understand, but he wouldn't speak it. He said if I speak to you, you wouldn't understand me. . . . They used to take care of a lot of reindeer and stuff . . . in Siberia. . . . He even had a pair . . . of mukluks from Siberia. . . . he didn't really say a lot of stories about it [Siberia], it was just that he seemed to long for it. He seemed to long to go back to Siberia. One day I did ask him, "How come you want to go to Siberia?" "Because that's where I lived long ago." And I said "you used to live in Siberia? No. I don't remember you living in Siberia." He laughed because he said you were not even born. [laughs]

Thus when people discuss their Russian heritage, place and kinship are common topics. People stressed their mixed ancestry and the importance of being able to try to trace where their ancestors came from. Some felt confident in the knowledge of their family tree, while others were still searching for information and expressed disappointment that they did not know more.

Feelings About Russian Ancestry and Sharing That Knowledge With Their Children

Another key question is "How do you feel about your Russian ancestry?" No one had an objection to being of Russian descent. Some people said they never considered it; others said it "didn't bother them" but then they would go on and explain that they were proud of their ancestry. Russian or other European ancestry was always secondary to their Native ancestry. For most, it was there and people were proud of it, but relatively unimportant, as they identified with their Native lifestyle on a day-to-day basis:

#8: You know all while I was growing up I never even considered it. I never, it never was ever something I thought of.

#3: I don't know cause I never, I don't have no feeling about it.

#7: It didn't bother me at all. I think, in a way I thought it made me feel a little bit special. I was different.

#11: It never really bothered me and my name they say is a Russian name. I think people are proud of it. I never heard of it bothering anyone. I don't think we've experienced the negative impacts that people around the southeast and the Aleutians have. . . . I don't think people really think about it that much.

#12a: I don't know. It doesn't bother me. It's just who I am I guess. Can't help it if I have the ancestry of Russian blood in me.

Other people said they were proud because it represented who they were and it was a link to their ancestors and connection to current relatives. The importance of knowing one's ancestors, knowing who you are and where you come from, is perhaps the foundation of indigenous identity. Kawagley (1995) talks about this value of extended family and to be very aware and appreciative of the bloodline. "It was so important that special terms and an elaborate system of relationships were devised. These relationships formed people's identity—who they were, where they were from, and what they represented" (pp. 19-20).

#2: I feel okay because it you know, I felt that I had my dad's ancestors in me I guess . . . Yes. Proud of being Russian and Yup'ik.

#5: Yes. I am happy, I like the way I am. I thank god for giving me this body and always try to keep it clean and not get sick.

#6: I was [proud of it]. Well what I know I was taught by my grandma and grandpa, I didn't have no folks then. I stayed with them and that's where I get all my information, what they tell me.

#13a: I feel good and proud of it.

#13b: I am very proud to be a Russian Orthodox...and the Russian Blood.

#14: Some part of me, is very happy, I'm happy to be, cause I still carry that, it's like somebody came along and stamped me and that's how it is, kinda.

And I wonder where we are, where we came from sometimes. I would like to go to Russia some day, just to see if I do have ancestors over there.

#19: Ya I am. Pretty good because, I am proud for all of them [heritages], come in one, we get together.

#18: Ya, ya being a Russian and being a Native at the same time, it's double double . . .

CJ: Double pride?

#18: Ya which I'm supposed to stay away from. [laughs]

The link to relatives in other places is an important aspect of identity. As stated in chapter 3, when people meet they usually try to establish a mutual link or relationship. The question "Who are you?" "*Kit'usit?*" is used as a way of making a connection. Relationships are the basis of personal identity, your ancestors, your family tree and how you are tied into others around you. Just as in the past, when people are traveling, they like to know that they have relatives in a certain place. It provides a tie to the land and to the people there.

#12b: I feel kind of glad to know about this and that. Where they are coming from and they end up, glad to know we have relatives everywhere. And my kids know their relatives too.

Some of those interviewed expressed interest in finding out more about their ancestry to help them make those connections to current relatives:

#20: I am absolutely proud of it. I would like to learn more of my ancestors, my grandpa, on their side of Yukon what they do. And I have so many relatives out there. . . . And after they find out who I was, they say "oh you're my relative." And "Wow" It's good to meet and share and they knew my dad and my grandpa so we have big family.

As stated above, when someone had Russian ancestry, it was always secondary to his or her Native ancestry. It was in the back of their mind, but not often thought of. One interviewee, summed it up nicely as follows:

#16: [In Russia] the reporter was asking me, because they know I have a Russian maiden name, um, they asked me how do I feel about having Russian blood. And because me coming from Alaska where we only think about Native blood, it was very difficult for me to answer that question because I never really thought about because you know what it means to me to even have Russian blood, because we don't really talk about it. We know it's part of our genes and my parents had not really discussed the history of our family. . . . in Alaska we only think of how Native we are, I've never really tried to grasp the thought of having maybe one sixteenth or one fourth, or something like that of Russian blood, and so I'm still trying to, I don't know if I want to say understand or acknowledge that part of us because being Native overpowers everything else. . . . but in Alaska we only worry about how Native we are, that's why it's difficult to grasp about how do we feel about having Russian blood.

The dialogue on how people felt about their Russian heritage led to a discussion of if their children knew about their Russian heritage, what they told their kids, and what was important to pass down to their children. Much of the discussion focused around the need to make sure their children knew where they came from, both past and present, and the importance of making the connection to their relatives. Again this is a function of the value of knowing who you are. This becomes a key element for identity.

#2: I always tell them when they get together to make sure they don't forget their ancestors, their grandparent and I let them know about my parents, my

dad and my mom where they come from and who they are, and my grandkids, my kids, they have the same.

#12a: I've told them what I told you, because I think it's important that they know that, their ancestry and I told them about the Russian ancestry that they have, the Athabascan, the different ethnic groups if you will that they have. And I think it's important that they know things.

#15: I've told them the stories that my dad and mom has told me. Just so they know where they came from.

#18: Yes [I've taught my kids their heritage]. Cause I'd rather they know, then not to know when they find out. I don't want them to be, having a difficult time with me.

Traditional stories also become the way that heritage is passed down. Some people indicated the important part to pass down were the old stories of how their grandparents lived, the practice of their Native traditions. Information about any mixture of Russian, Yup'ik, or Athabascan blood was not discussed as much:

#20: Well I tell them what my dad and mom and they tell me stories and they say how they know and I say I don't know, they know so much. . . . It's blended right now. It's not just not how they, I know that parents don't talk to their kids about their, about where their parents come from or their uppas and grams where they come from. I never did hear that much. . . . I don't know [why]. Me I always talk to my kids about what my dad used to tell us, tell me. And then I pass it down to my boy, my girls, to always respect the elders and help. The more you help . . . the better things will be later.

The aspect most associated with Russian ancestry is knowledge of Russian Orthodoxy and church traditions, which are often mentioned as important to pass down to their children. This of course is a direct link to Russian heritage and often pointed out as the main thing that is remaining from people's Russian past. A direct

reflection of Orthodoxy is the Christmas Selaviq celebration that was discussed in chapter 4. Only two of the villages in the middle Kuskokwim region have resident Orthodox priests, yet all celebrate Selaviq, which becomes the most visible component of church life.

#11: Yes I try to, letting them know where their ancestors are from and then taking them to Selaviq. . . . Right now I think [it's important to pass down] a lot of the Russian like the church traditions that have to do with the Russian Orthodox Church and keeping Selaviq going.

#14: [The thing I want to pass down] The way that they carry the holidays. The respect for the church. I think it's important to keep it. To have a sense of, sometimes I wonder how were we living before they ever started doing that. . . . Ya, how did we live long time ago, before they came and pushed all that stuff? I think we were very peaceful people at one point in our life. I would like to think so, but then I heard we all had wars between each other.



Figure 11: Father Vasilli Changsak

Father Vasilli Changsak served as the Orthodox priest in Kuskokwim Region from 1923 to 1966.

Photo taken from the elders' wall at the George Morgan Sr. High School in Kalskag.

Reference to Father Vasilii's service taken from Oleksa, 1992, p. 233.

One family in particular has taken it upon themselves to become better educated in Orthodoxy and strengthen their family's knowledge. That same mother organized a trip to Russia for herself and her children, and two other children, staying in a monastery and learning more about their Orthodox roots:

#16: I am trying to learn about Orthodoxy because we're Russian Orthodox. I listen to podcasts about Orthodoxy on ancient faith radio and you know because I want to understand Orthodoxy because it can be an excellent foundation for individuals but because we're not taught it, a lot of people don't understand or even know why or how come we do this or that. So I take it upon myself for my education and my children's education because I want them to understand that it's just not going to church on Saturdays and Sundays, that there's other awesome stuff. The things we saw [in Russia], for me it was so amazing. . . . I don't have any words to say, it was so amazing. So back to how I chose, we chose, I learned, I listened to a podcast about monasteries, and they talk about how we should try to bring our children to monasteries because the nuns and the monks they live a certain life, a life of prayer and everything like that, and try to see a different point of view of Orthodoxy so that's how come I wanted to bring my kids to a monastery.

After being told about their Russian ancestry, children are showing added interest in their heritage, especially as they grow into young adults. Knowing where they come from helps children and young adults gain confidence and pride. Knowing who you are is a foundation for identity.

#12c: Yes they are all Russian Orthodox, both my mom and my dad. And I did mention to my kids that they were part Russian and they were kind of like surprised and happy at the same time cause they have some Russian blood in them and now that they know they want to learn more about it, and so do I want to learn, learn more of my background, family tree. It's good to know where we came from.

#7: I tell them that my great-grandfather was Russian and my grandfather was Russian and we're all part Russian. . . . I haven't really thought of that [what is important to pass down]. Actually my daughters have Russian friends that they work with at the bank and you know the church is the same

and the *pelatuuk* [scarf], they wear *pelatuuks* just like we do. So they are actually doing the comparison.

#8: On myfamily.com and we have a family page on there and everybody, so many of them are on there and she put the family history on there and the family tree, and old pictures, and people from different parts of the country put their old pictures on there . . . and then the actual newsletter that goes out to everybody. . . . My daughter did the same thing in high school. She researched her family. And I've copied this I don't know how many times for other family members as I meet them, sharing it with them. I've given it to my niece. . . . She's on the same family tree. And some of the people I've met in Russian Mission, I've copied and sent it to them. And I need to copy it for my cousin in Holy Cross and I've copied it for a relative in Kalskag and everybody as we talk and find out where we're at on the tree.

When people discussed how they felt about their Russian ancestry, they were proud because it was a part of who they were and a link to their ancestors.

However, as interviewee #16 stated, "being Native overpowers everything else." Another important point was that people wanted to know who their relatives were and were proud that they "have relatives everywhere" and "have so many relatives out there." This was the main reason that it is important to share ancestry with their children, so that their children would also know who their relatives are and so that they "don't forget their ancestors" and "know where they come from." People also said that they taught their children "to always respect the elders and help" them.

Interviewee #12c described how her children felt about having Russian blood, "now that they know they want to learn more about it, and so do I want to learn more about my background." Others want to learn more about Orthodoxy, "but because we're not taught it, a lot of people don't understand."

Blending of Indigenous Native Groups in the Area, Principally Yup'ik and Athabascan

As stated in my first chapter, the middle Kuskokwim region is a unique blend of Yup'ik and Athabascan languages and cultures. In precontact times Yup'ik peoples gradually moved up the Kuskokwim adapting to the riverine environment and Athabascan lifestyle. The traditional territories of three Athabascan language groups, Deg Xinag, Upper Kuskokwim, and Dena'ina, as well as Central Yup'ik converge in the middle Kuskokwim.

This blending of Athabascan and Yup'ik, language and culture is still seen today. I was surprised to find that a number of those that I interviewed described themselves as being Athabascan. Most of those interviewed did not use a specific Athabascan language or cultural group, only referring to Indian or Athabascan. In two interviews people referred to themselves as Ingalik or Malimiut. Malimiut was described at the beginning of this chapter. The term Ingalik is also referenced previously and is described in a footnote.

For some the identification as Athabascan meant that they felt they did not quite fit in when they moved into Yup'ik country; for others it was surprising when they found out they were Athabascan. Many found out the more complete story of their heritage as young adults when they started to ask their parents or older elders.

There was also an interesting discussion that took place when I asked a follow-up question if there was a difference between people describing themselves as Yup'ik or Yupiaq. Kawagley (1995) uses Yupiaq in his writing, defines Yupiaq as the original term for "real person," and states that it is the same as the modern term Yup'ik (p. 160). Jacobson (1984) also defines both Yup'ik and Yupiaq as literally "real person" (p. 416). I have also heard people living in Crooked Creek and Sleetmute emphatically saying, "We are Yupiaq, not Yup'ik." How people define themselves can elicit strong emotions, so I posed the question to some of my interviewees:

#12a: I've never heard our people being referred to as Yupiaq while growing up, but I've heard Harold Napoleon say that that is the correct term for us. Another person from our village also drilled home to us that we are "Yupiaq people!!" Personally, I prefer to be called a Yup'ik.

#15: I only heard from one person from our village, arguing that it's "Not Yup'ik - It Is Yupiaq!" And honestly I never heard my parents say Yupiaq. Even other villages they never argue as much.

#13b: Yupiaq mean real people. Yup'ik is just what the white men named us cause it was easier to say. I notice down river refer to themselves as Yup'ik, not sure why.

It seems like the term Yup'ik is principally used for downriver Yup'ik, and by the time you reach the middle Kuskokwim, some people prefer Yupiaq. "The difference is in regional definition. Upper Kuskokwim people identify themselves as Yupiat. For us this means lifestyle of the genuine ancient Yupiit" (T. John, personal communication, November 2013). The discussion and ardent feelings about using Yup'ik or Yupiaq to define oneself is another complex indicator of identity that points out differences as well as similarities within a group of people, even from the same village.

A sense of place is also very important when we talk about identity. The knowledge of place is important to help establish roots. When one family moved, they felt the lack of connection, and even bias. They felt they didn't fit in and are still searching for more information on their ancestral roots:

#1a: Til we came down here [Kalskag] we were Ingaliks, got some Indian in us. With my family, my mom and my dad's kids we have more Ingalik, because my dad came over from the Yukon ways. So we have more Indian in us.

#1b: I went to school right about when I was seven and it seemed like from the time that I was seven even up to now, sometimes I feel disconnected because I had to be taken and put in a different place, so right now I don't

know too much about my family. I know who I am related to, like these two girls. . . . I know they [my parents] come from Yukon somewhere. . . . Long time ago they used to say that we're, our ancestors were Malimiut.

#1c: That wasn't important to me [what I was]. It never was important to me until my daughter, my oldest daughter, she had, cause we were treated differently, those kids were always saying you guys are Ingalik, and they treated us different here.

#1a: Says we talk too fast.

#1c: Uhuh and we do things too fast. We think too fast and they never made us forget that we were not of this village and it was just one particular family, not everybody was like that. It wasn't important to me, what I was, what was important was what I learned, being taught, until my oldest daughter, she was in high school and she went off to an area of people that looked like us, around Fairbanks area, Nikolai and all that. And they treated her like they treat their own people, and she came home and she was really adamant about it; "OK mother, where are we from and what are we!" "Well I have to learn first." That's why I looked into it because I had to pass that on to my kids. So whenever I saw people from upriver, I would ask them questions about our family and who was my mom's mother and who was her family and all that and how we are all related.

For the family that feels misplaced as well as those who are critical of them, the heritage and culture associated with place is a dominant factor in establishing their identity. This following interview also makes reference to a distinction made between upriver and downriver people. This is of course a regional distinction made depending on one's location, one's place. Place and regional association is a deciding factor in identity, as evidenced from this study. Thus identity has several levels: individual, village and regional.

#16: My parents are from upriver, from Sleetmute, Crooked, so we obviously look different from a lot of people here and I used to always wonder why that was. And why, you know, we were different. And um we were always told that we were Yup'ik and then when I went to Fairbanks...this man asked me, "Where are you from?" And I told him and he said, "What race are you?" I said "I don't know, Yup'ik?" And he says, "Really? You look like one of our people." You know, Athabascans. And so he was telling me why I look like some of his people or whatever. So when I came back, the first thing I asked my mom was, "What are we? How come these people say I look like their people and how come we don't look like the rest of the people here?" You know cause it's obvious and she was like, "Well . . ." "Are we Athabascan then?" She said, "Ya." So I said, "How come you tell us we're Yup'ik?" And she goes, "because we live among Yup'iks." And they used to be really treated different because they were from upriver when they first moved here and Bethel because they were from upriver they treat them different. You know *qagkumiut*—upriver people, *unugkumiut*—down river people. And so you know I felt like I was having an identity crisis and they never told us about, they told us bits and pieces of us being Russian, I mean it's obvious, our last name and my real name...it's a Russian name and my sisters have Russian names. It was confusing to me because growing up I knew we were different but I didn't know why. I was just a little ignorant kid that didn't know why, how come, this and that, whatever. So because my parents were treated terribly when they moved from upriver down that's how come we were told we were Yup'ik.

In chapter 1, I discussed the mixing of Yup'ik and Athabascan cultures in the middle Kuskokwim region. That mixing was very evident as people talked about their indigenous ancestry. The knowledge of some ancestral Athabascan-Yup'ik

conflicts have been passed down, but yet there was intermarriage and blended ancestry:

#20: I hear about little something about Yukon and over here they used to fight against one anothers. Or between Aniak and Kalskag or one of those Creeks...way up there. Coming on down, I heard about that and those Natives not get along and Yukon, that's all I hear.

CJ: The Natives from here wouldn't get along with the Yukon?

#20: Im hmm.

CJ: Like you said you thought of yourself as four-fourths Athabascan?

#8: Ya and my dad would say he was part Indian and part Eskimo and I never believed him that he was part Eskimo. I thought that he was just, I don't know, just talking. But I keep seeing these on his Grandmother's side there is lot of Yup'ik.

#19: I think we are some Russian blood both in my grandmas mostly. Also Indian on my dad's side and maybe Russian. My mom was half Russian and Malimiut, Northern Eskimo.

Language is also an important indicator of identity, especially in past generations. However as stated previously, many Athabascans who moved into Yup'ik country picked up the Yup'ik language and now we see elders who may be ethnically Athabascan speaking Yugtun:

#23: That's where, Athabascan come around. There was people from around there that were Athabascan. No wonder my grandma don't talk. I don't know if she talk English, but she don't talk in Yup'ik. Like us.

CJ: So she talked Athabascan huh?

#23: Ya.

CJ: But you learned Yup'ik right, not Athabascan, Or you know some Athabascan too?

#23: Just a few words. I never see my grandma talk Yup'ik, only my uppa. But he talked to his wife Athabascan. I never pay attention what they talking about.

Some people point out that the blending of Yup'ik and Athabascan in the middle Kuskokwim region is easily seen, but is not always discussed or acknowledged:

#15: You know when you look at like Kalskag people, and right from there, that's the point from there, downriver, below Lower Kalskag, they're Eskimo people, but us from up here, you can tell by our . . . skin color, people are mixed from Athabascan and Eskimo mixed. . . . In class I try to let the kids know in each of my class periods in my cultural teachings I let them know of their ancestry. If they say they're Eskimo they might not be full Eskimo.

They could be Athabascan Eskimo, or Russian Orthodox heritage.

CJ: Are they surprised, is that the first time they really thought about it, or most of them know it?

#15: I don't know. They just listen and some of them they might not have had that knowledge the first time from myself, and some of them maybe their parents never told them too and they believe when they put in their application that they are full Yup'ik Eskimos.

#15: And our Yup'ik language too...There are some words you know the different dialects. It's interesting to hear too how they speak upriver. From listening to them they have a sing song...I know Tuluksak they're kind of slow, upriver talks faster than downriver. When I listen to them and even when they speak in their fluent Yup'ik language they're, they talk slow. They use it in their slow Yup'ik speaking too. You can hear it when they translate into English too.

In a few cases, very interesting personal stories came out in the interviews, helping illustrate life in the past and the many trials along the way. Knowing personal family history is an essential part of one's family identity:

#12c: My mom, they migrated. They went from Stony River to all the way to my hometown, Nondalton is. They walked all the way down. Cause my mother remembers being on my dad's back when they were walking. Young, they walk all the way down. Look on the map you see where Stony River is all the way to where Nondalton is. I think that's where they met my dad cause my dad is from Iliamna.

#23: That big flu they had. No my dad had born and somebody found him. He was still nursing from his mom even she's gone. So they took him, raise him. . . . My dad used to tell us about how he grew up with those foster parents. They took care of him just like their own. He said he used to, when he come to himself, he was down there some place, in that Owhat, Ohagamute, whatever, down there, that's where his foster parents were. He said his [birth] parents were from Shageluk.

Once again the discussion of place is important. Throughout the interviews people referred to specific villages, upriver versus downriver people, Yup'ik versus Athabascan, Yup'ik versus Yupiaq, and Yukon versus Kuskokwim. The heritage and culture associated with place is a dominant factor in establishing identity. Again the awareness of not knowing much about their family and asking, "Where are we from?" and "What are we?" and "How are we related?" came out in the dialogues. There were also narratives of discrimination and "not fitting in." Knowing personal family history is an essential part of one's family identity.

Blending of Catholicism and Orthodoxy in Many Families

The two most prevalent religions in the middle Kuskokwim region are Catholic and Russian Orthodox. There is also one Protestant church in Kalskag and one in Aniak, with smaller congregations. Many of the families are either Orthodox or Catholic, but many are mixed and attend both churches. Selaviq, or “Russian Christmas” also brings people of all religions together. Even during the month of October in Aniak, families go to a different house each night to say the Catholic rosary. I have noticed that both Catholic and Orthodox families participate. I have also seen this cooperation during community “feeds” in honoring a first hunt, a funeral, or “40-day” celebration (a special meal is often prepared 40 days after a loved one’s death), and at elder conferences, where the Catholic congregation and the Orthodox congregation both do prayers.

Religious identity is a specific and key type of identity in the middle Kuskokwim region. Church activities are a unifying influence and can serve as a way that outsiders are welcomed into the community. Religious identity also maintains ties to the particular religion, and for Orthodoxy in the middle Kuskokwim, combines Russian and Indigenous spirituality. Membership in a religious group results in a specific religious identity for the individual and becomes part of their self-concept.

Despite early completion and conflict between the Catholic and Orthodox clergy, as illustrated in chapters 2 and 4, today religiously mixed families are quite prevalent. The interviews that are included here are from families that are both Orthodox and Catholic and focus on how this blending seems to have worked mostly successfully, at least in the recent past.

When two people, one of whom was Catholic and the other Orthodox, wished to marry, conversion was common in just the past generation:

CJ: And your family is not Russian Orthodox are they?

#12a: No they're not. Well I take that back because my father was baptized as Russian Orthodox because his family was Orthodox and when he moved to Kalskag, he moved, how do you say he went from . . .

CJ: Converted?

#12a: Yes converted to Catholic.

CJ: And your mother was she Orthodox or?

#12a: She was Catholic. She grew up in the mission in Holy Cross.

Some people noted the difference between past generations and the current generation as far as religious conversion:

#11: What I've noticed growing up is that if there was a non-Orthodox person marrying a Russian Orthodox person, that the non-Orthodox person would convert to Russian. Now days it is common to see parents of two different religions in the same household. Whereas back then the Russian Orthodox faith was more dominant in the home, or the only faith in the home...When you get married in the Russian Orthodox church at least one of your sponsors are, it's requested that one of them is Russian Orthodox.

CJ: Even now or before?

#11: Even now.

CJ: What's the sponsor do?

#11: The sponsor holds the crown when the couple gets married, and they are like godparents to the couple, so they help guide them throughout their marriage. When I was growing up you rarely saw sponsors who had faith other than Russian Orthodox.

CJ: So do they still do the sponsors now?

#11: Yes they still do the sponsors.

CJ: And the sponsors are they still Russian Orthodox?

#11: The priest will request that at least one of the sponsors be Russian Orthodox.

CJ: Do people ever get married in both churches or they pretty much decide on which church they will get married in?

#11: Well for instance when my husband and I got married in the Catholic Church but then we had our marriage blessed at the Russian Church.

CJ: So it wasn't a full ceremony, it was just a blessing.

#11: Ya.

CJ: I bet you could do it the other way around too right, get married in the Russian Orthodox and then get blessed in the Catholic?

#11: Yes I've heard of it.

Another common occurrence in their parents' era was when one spouse converted to the religion of the other spouse. However the subsequent generation of children is often of mixed religions where some of the children are Catholic and others are Orthodox:

CJ: And with the Russian Orthodox Church, was your family Russian Orthodox?

#17: Just my mom. My dad was Catholic. He was the head of the household and that's the way my mom believed in it. When we had kids they took charge, and then some of my kids are Orthodox and some are Catholic. Oh I take that back, my grandpa told me that when they were out for a month his oldest brother went to become a Russian priest. I think he went down to Sitka and they never heard from him after that. . . . He asked his dad he want to become an Orthodox priest, and they sent him, but we don't know where. After that we never heard from him.

#15: My dad actually his parents were Russian Orthodox and when he married my mom, she's Catholic, and he switched to Catholic and his uncles, or his cousins, they are all Russian Orthodox and but us we're all Catholic.

CJ: So did you ever hear any stories when they were with the Russian Church or anything?

#15: No only just what they learned from the priests, and the priests were taught by Russian what are they, like missionary kind of things on the Russian Orthodox side, just like our Catholic.

CJ: So did they ever say what type of things they were taught or learned from the priests?

#15: The only thing I know is the way they have their Christmas, and they've always practiced their Christmas according to Russian Orthodox practice.

CJ: And you are talking about Selaviq?

#15: Ya.

CJ: Did they refer to it as Selaviq back then I wonder?

#15: That's all I hear, I never hear anything else but Selaviq.

Yet others had parents who retained their church affiliation and the children grew up in both Catholic and Orthodox churches:

CJ: So was your family Catholic or Russian Orthodox or mix?

#20: My dad is Catholic and my mom is Orthodox.

CJ: So growing up did you go to both churches?

#20: Both

CJ: And that worked out ok?

#20: Ya.

In some cases because of resistance to religious intermarriage, the couple "eloped" with a marriage that was later blessed by the two churches. Some of the children and their families are Catholic; others are Orthodox:

#7: My dad married my mom, she was a Catholic, so not everybody in my family is Russian Orthodox, just myself and my brother. The rest were

Catholic, but there might be a few that decided they wanted to be Russian Orthodox.

CJ: I didn't realize that she [your mom] was Catholic at one point.

#7: She was always Catholic.

CJ: Because she had Selaviq at her house and stuff.

#7: Ya, she did it for my dad because he was so strong in the Russian Orthodox. And then we always have it in my mom's house in memory of all the Russian, I mean all our ancestors. Because they always say that when you have Selaviq that all your ancestors are there with you, especially in the last round.

CJ: So if your mom was Catholic and your dad was Russian Orthodox, how did they meet? Did they just meet here?

#7: Ya in the community. Actually they had requested to get married and both families said no so they eloped. [laughs] Went down to Bethel and got married.

CJ: So how did you guys decide, I mean did you decide or your parents decide. How did some end up to be Catholic and some end up to be Russian Orthodox?

#7: All the older kids were all Catholics and then my brother and I were the only ones who were baptized in Russian, but we were also baptized in Catholic so we were baptized in both Catholic and Russian Orthodox Church.

CJ: I'm kind of surprised if your father was that strong of a Russian Orthodox why he didn't, why you guys didn't all . . .

#7: I don't know. But they, my mom and dad after they eloped, they got married by the magistrate down there, they came back and got married both in the Russian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church.

CJ: So they got married by the magistrate and then they came back here and got married in the Catholic Church and the Russian Church?

#7: Ya . . . My sister . . . she's got the [Russian] prayer book. She can read the parts in Russian. She listened to the prayers and she learned how to read the book. So she was always feeling like she should have been the Russian, and not me. [laughs] The one that was Russian Orthodox and not Catholic. [laughs]

One person who was interviewed has taken it upon herself to learn much more about Orthodoxy and now focuses on attending only that church and raising her children exclusively in the Orthodox faith:

#16: Well, you know, um, I can only speak from personal experience, when our priest travels, or travel, I would bring my kids to the Catholic Church just so they could hear something. But now I chose not to do that anymore. One thing, that especially in regards to dogma and how the core of Orthodoxy there are certain things that cannot be changed. *Presvytera*¹⁶ Constantinou, she's a Greek Orthodox wife, she's called a *Presvytera*, we call them *Matruska*, so she says things like, there's very different teachings in regards to Catholic. There's a lot of stuff that are the same but at a certain point of time there's a schism, we start thinking differently. She talks about, I can't remember the name, where he branched out, of thinking. With the Orthodox Church we don't have a Pope, we don't have one person over everybody, it's a communal kind of talking with each other about and making a decision together instead of one person saying it's this way or that way. Because it's that, things take a really long time to get answered. And because it's like that, ya we have bishops that come together and discuss things, you know the fathers, that's

¹⁶ *Presbyteria* (Greek: πρεσβυτέρα, pronounced *presvytéra*) is a Greek title of honor that is used to refer to a priest's wife. This term was used on Ancient Faith Radio:

www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/searchthescriptures, which includes podcasts for Orthodoxy instruction: "Presvytera and Dr. Jeannie Constantinou guides us through Holy Scripture with the eyes of the Church Fathers."

what they are, and they discuss stuff and they decide what's gonna be and so a lot of what the Catholics, I can't remember, search the scriptures you can understand when you listen to them, you know when we go to places that worship or have church in a different way we tend to absorb some of their thoughts and beliefs, and that's so for Orthodox that are only in Orthodox churches, that's because it's surprising to them to see that they go to this church and that church and whatever, and now days you take whatever is good from that religion and put them together but you know basically what Jeannie Constantinou talk about is that when we do that we're making our self God or making our self the boss, we're choosing instead of following.

I was told one very interesting story about early Orthodox conversion. This story is key because it shows an indigenous perspective on the missionizing efforts of the Orthodox Church and the initial fear that was invoked. It also mentions both Catholic and Orthodox outcomes, so it may be that this conversion effort was at a time when the Catholic Church had already established roots in the area, which fits with the time frame of the story, because the interviewee's father, who was told to go hide, was born in 1904 according to the person interviewed.

#13b: I was wondering how we were all Russian Orthodox and some of our family was Catholic.

CJ: And did they say why some were Russian and some were Catholic?

#13b: Ya. The story that my dad told us is that the Russians came to Ohagmuit, below Kalskag, and they started saying we are going to baptize you now to Russian Orthodox and they were scared, they didn't know what was going on. So my dad took my auntie and uncle, I don't know who else was all, his brothers and sisters, I don't know who was alive then or born then, he took them all out, my uppa said go hide, we don't know what they are doing, we don't know what's going on. So they went down and hid because they didn't know what the Russians were doing, they had no idea.

And then after they got used to the idea, after they seen what Russian Orthodox was and learned more about it, my dad got baptized to Russian Orthodoxy because he was Catholic first and my auntie was baptized, she was younger, she was just baptized in Russian Orthodox, but my uncle was Catholic and he didn't want to make that change over, so he stayed Catholic. But the rest of them, they were all young enough, once they were born, to be baptized into Russian Orthodox, the Russian Orthodox Church.

Spirituality is a key component of indigenous identity. In the middle Kuskokwim region the two main religions are Russian Orthodoxy and Catholicism. Today many families are blended, having a long history or just recent history of intermarriage. Although there was much conflict and competition between Orthodox and Catholic missionaries in the past, as described in chapters 2 and 4, today's families recognize some of the differences between the two religions but still comfortably worship and live together. One example is the Orthodox celebration of Selaviq in which people of all religions participate. It brings together people of the village as well as surrounding villages. Part of its appeal is that the feasting and gift giving is done in memory of the ancestors of the particular household that is hosting the star. "They always say that when you have Selaviq that all your ancestors are there with you." This is clearly a link to indigenous values of honoring ancestors and knowing your family tree. This membership in a religious group results in a specific religious identity for the individual and becomes part of their self-concept.

Influence of the Holy Cross Catholic Mission

As seen in the discussion of Orthodoxy and Catholicism, many of the Catholic families established their roots from time spent at the Holy Cross mission. Chapter 4 discussed the formation of the Mission at Holy Cross and some of the widespread impact on the region.

When I first came to Aniak in the 1970s, I wondered why there were a lot of people who didn't speak their Native language. Elders would sometimes use Yup'ik among themselves, but it was not heard in day-to-day conversation, and no children and few adults knew the language. Many people of the elder generation, especially Catholic families, spent time at the Holy Cross mission. This is often where conversion to Catholicism occurred.

Those interviewed talked mostly positively about their parents or grandparents attending the mission, taking over the parenting duties when children were orphaned or left with only one parent. However, I did not interview anyone who had personally attended the mission school.

In the early days of the mission, workers were recruited to help with the construction. In at least one case, this meant a shift not only in location, but also in religion, and also a change in their name of what has become a very large family in the Yukon-Kuskokwim region:

They [the Demientieffs] were trained in carpentry and they were recruited then by the Catholic mission to come over to Holy Cross to help build the buildings there and that took the Demientieffs from the Kuskokwim area over to the Catholic area to work on the church building and they were the sons of this Demientieff and that's how the whole big Demientieff family came about because of that. And then of course then they adopted, they shifted I guess from Orthodox religion to the Catholic religion. (R. L. Collins, personal communication, May 2013)

#18: So for example you mentioned the fur traders, some of our families in the Yukon Kuskokwim delta have their ancestry with the fur traders, the Russian fur traders. I think I'd be safe enough to say, the Demientieff family over in Russian Mission, I mean Holy Cross, Saint Iakov Netsvetov, when he traveled to the Kuskokwim to Kolmakovskiy Redoubt would depend on Nikolai Demientieff for information and one day he found out that he was

gone, moved somewhere else [laughs] and he didn't know where he had moved. Later on he found out he was on the Yukon River somewhere but he never saw him again.

#8: My dad said that the Catholic Church changed it [our last name] so we wouldn't sound Russian. [laughs] We'd be more American. . . . His dad died when he was six months, his mom died when he was, I think he spent time in the mission at different parts of his life and so did my mom. The mission [Holy Cross Mission] took care of orphans or people that had trouble caring for, a mother left alone with small children. The smaller ones would be put there or maybe the older ones that could help with the gardens. . . . I was thinking a lot of people sent their kids to be raised by the mission if they lost their spouse.

CJ: So that's when your family became Catholic then at that point?

#8: Probably ya, because when my great-grandfather moved from Kolmakovskiy to Holy Cross he stayed, I think the church was just starting up then and he helped them build the church and everything. So that's probably when he became a Catholic. . . . My sister found out . . . when the French nuns baptized the children they changed the name Dementov to the English or American version Demientieff. . . . It says "the French nuns of the Catholic Mission in Holy Cross changed the spelling of our name . . . when they baptized all the first 7 . . . and their children. Now they are legally Demientieff according to Baptismal records." [The Demientieff family history is well known in the region and I have received permission to use the names in this interview.]

Renner (2005), does not mention the Dementovs when talking about the building of the Holy Cross mission. However he does describe construction at Ohagamiut:

Nicholaj Dementov, manager of a nearby trading post, [was hired] to build a mission house at Ohagamiut. The house was built of logs, was one-story high, had five rooms, with a hall through the center. It was finished by October 1892. Father Francis A. Barnum, S.J., who visited Ohagamiut soon after the house was finished, described it as “by far the most solid and best constructed building we have.” (p. 487)

Interestingly the Demientieff family was also involved in working with the Moravian mission. Henkelman and Vitt (1985) described several instances where the Dementoffs (Demientieffs) were involved. Three traders, Lind, Dementoff, and Andrianoff, helped transport mission goods in their *bidaras* from the Kuskokwim bay to Bethel in 1881 (p. 124). Kilbuck contracted with the son of the Russian trader, Dementoff, at Kolmakovsky, to transport logs for a new school house at the Bethel mission (p. 127). In 1892 a contract was arranged with Mr. Dementoff, trader at Kolmakovsky, to build a house at Ogavik (p. 168). And Kilbuck contracted with Mr. Dementoff to build a sloop forty feet by nine feet to meet the requirements of the Kuskokwim stations. Unfortunately Mr. Dementoff became ill and died in the spring of 1893, prior to his being able to build the boat as planned (pp. 318-319).

As previously discussed, the epidemics that struck the middle Kuskokwim had a devastating effect on the population. The missions took in orphans and other children who had lost a parent. They sometimes changed the birthdays and the name of the children. The missions taught children a trade and everyone worked in the fields to help grow food and sustain the mission. As the children grew the mission even helped them find spouses.

It is also interesting to see how the problem of a lost spouse was dealt with in the early American period. Orphanages were established by the Catholics at Holy Cross and by the Episcopal Church at Anvik. Men who lost their wives due to the epidemics sent their children to these orphanages from throughout the Interior at least for the winter so they [could] continue their

hunting and trapping. And then they'd pick them up in the summertime initially. (R. L. Collins, personal communication, October 2013)

#19: And back then after that it was kind of slowly to the Americans and the missionaries come. They say the Catholics put that Holy Cross, they call it Holy Cross. They set up they had everything out there, even a school. My mom went to school there up to 3rd grade and when I was in High School down in Oregon, I went down to Oregon in my high school years, she used to write to me and she write good, really no mistakes, even she was in 3rd grade, write to me in Oregon. . . . They changed when they were documenting, they were coming in and documenting, and the church always, I had a hard time with my mom and my uncles estates. They had two birthday things, one was from the Catholic they were putting them down and one was from the State. But in the same month and different days. Finally we straightened them out, my mom's and my uncle.

#17: There was a lot of TB, or something going on and that's where they sent a lot of those kids, the ones that survived were sent to the mission. Up and down the Yukon river. And that's all I know about that.

#19: The mission too they did lots. They were getting missions, the Moravian down there and up here the Catholics. There were missions and they were taking on the Yupiaq families. Their moms and dads they were gone and they were taking on their kids, teach them in school and work them and whatever they want to do and they go work. And that's how the government want state of Alaska to get more people...all the kids that had no fathers or mothers, they sent them to the mission. My mom went. My uppa his wife died early in, his older kids they were, except the younger ones were going to school out there and she met many friends. Some of them those people from around here, she knew even from out there. Also out in the Catholic missions, when

the kids they grew up and they were all living and married and intermarried from those kids.

One interviewee mentioned that their dad said the mission nuns were “mean.” Without more details, it’s impossible to know what this means, although the nuns had a reputation of being strict, and we do know that students could not speak their Native language in school:

CJ: Did any of your family spend any time in the Holy Cross mission?

#20: My dad did when he was growing up. And he said when he was there, he was going to school or something and his dad took him out from there because in those days those nuns used to be so mean, I mean they were strict, they were strict in those days. . . . My grandpa took him out and teach him how to go out trapping, trap line, let him stay in the woods, sell furs.

#17: That time, my thinking on that was he [my grandpa] never go communion or church for a long time since the Catholic mission was in Holy Cross, he changed religions. See that’s the only thing I can think of. My dad never say anything much about it. And then they moved down to Paimute and after that you know they go where the animals are hunting. My grandpa and dad they went through here and up the Innoko River someplace hunting beavers. And as they were coming home they told my dad that I think his mom or grandma died, one of them. And he never did go back to Holy Cross for twenty years and that’s where he met my mom, here. I think it was down at Lower.

The Catholic presence in the area also affected the settlement patterns. Over the years I have been told that people also moved to Kalskag to establish a Catholic Church. Although populations are now mixed, traditionally Lower Kalskag has the

Orthodox Church and Upper Kalskag (or Kalskag) has the Catholic and Protestant Churches.

#5: Yes. There was more Chuathbaluk peoples long time ago, they say most of the peoples were Russian but when the Holy Cross had mission, lots of people came to Kalskag.

CJ: So you said there were lots of Russians in the area, lots of Russians around?

#5: Those people used to live long time ago, when they turn to Catholic, I still hear them singing Russian Christmas songs when I was growing up they knew how yet cause they were Russian before. But they all gone right now most of those people.

As discussed previously, there was often conflict, antagonism and scare tactics in the early years of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches. The competition was great as Catholic and Orthodox missionaries competed for the same converts after the sale of Alaska. It was also a time when the Orthodox Church was less active, while the new missionaries increased their activity:

#18: It [the conflict] was deep down. Especially when Alaska became a territory, some peoples used scare tactics on the Natives, especially the ones that were already baptized Russian Orthodox, like there were some places where the coastal areas, lower Yukon, there were some Orthodox churches, they are very rare. They were the ones that were built there first, like St. Michael for example, the people along the Yukon River were baptized Russian Orthodox as far up the river as Nulato. And when Alaska became a territory there was no longer an Orthodox church, it was kind of under the rug so to speak. Most of the people stood firm in their baptism, stayed firm in their Orthodox.

CJ: What kind of scare tactics did they use?

#18: One way I've been told is that if you are Russian Orthodox you would not be able to buy or sell any thing from the stores and those kind of things. You had to make your child go to this school or you would be thrown into jail. And the people were converted without the knowledge of their parents, the school children. And it happened to my uncle and he talked finally about it. [laughs] He said when he went to school and he did not know what was going on and one day the Catholic bishop came and slapped him on the face and said, "You're a Catholic now." [laughs]. . . . It happened in Holy Cross. He had no choice but to go to school there and he went there for a few years. He was one of the only a few elders who was able to speak fluent English. But he would laugh about that.

Many of the people I interviewed had relatives who attended the Holy Cross Catholic Mission, which initiated their family's Catholic faith. Here place becomes very important in personal and family religious identity. Mostly people talk about how the mission played an important role and took in orphans after the epidemics and taught students basic skills. But there were also stories of the "nuns being so mean," and in one interview a father who attended the mission "never say anything much about it and never did go back to Holy Cross for twenty years." I have also heard another elder, who remains very active in the Catholic Church, say "the mission took away my language, but that's okay."

One of the people interviewed also described the "scare tactics," after Alaska became a territory, that were used on Natives who were Orthodox. Those tactics include not being able to buy anything at the store and kids being forced to go to the Catholic mission school. This also coincides with some of the Orthodox reports of harassment and stealing converts as summarized in chapter 2. Coercion, conflict, antagonism and scare tactics were common in the early days of competition for Catholic and Orthodox converts after the sale of Alaska.

Physical Characteristics That Often Identify Russian Ancestry

Light or curly hair, light skin, and eye color is often referred to as a sign of Russian blood. It is often used to help explain light skin or other physical characteristics. For some elders it was the way they found out about their Russian ancestry. Light coloring is in a way legitimized by the presence of Russian ancestry.

#2: One time I was in Anchorage coming home there was this one Russian lady, the way she speak I didn't understand what she was talking about. She came to me and she said, she asked me if I had Russian ancestors. And I said how come. And she said because your hair is not dark dark black, like it's dark brown she said I must have Russian ancestors. So I told her about my dad that he had some Russian blood in him. She said no wonder you don't look that much of Native looking, your hair is not dark dark. It make me wonder so I must have Russian blood. [laughs]. . . . I always tell them [my children] when they get together to make sure they don't forget their ancestors, their grandparent and I let them know about my parents, my dad and my mom where they come from and who they are, and my grandkids, my kids, they have the same. Some of them do not have really black black hair, they have dark brown hair. Even my great grandkids they have some brownish color and my mom used to say when she see them, brown hair, she said that's part of Russian.

CJ: So how did you feel about being part Russian?

#7: It didn't bother me at all. I think, in a way I thought it made me feel a little bit special.

CJ: How so, why?

#7: I was different. My eyes were bigger. [laughs] I never thought of myself as any different than anyone else, except for my big eyes. Because they did call me big eyed when I was a child. [laughs] So that was one thing that was different from everyone else.

CJ: When you were a child did you figure, you probably didn't know why, or did your parents say that's because you were Russian?

#7: No they didn't say why I had big eyes, they just said you have big eyes. Your eyes are big. *lirpak* (Yugtun for big eyes) that's what they used to call me when I was a child. But my mom said when you get older you get a different name.

#12a: Yes I do have Russian ancestry on my mother's side of the family. Her mother was as we call it full-blown Russian. Blue eyes and real light complected and that's what I have been told.

#12c: My dad's mom was full Russian, she had red hair and they didn't say what color her eyes were though, and light complexion. That's all I know what my dad told me. My cousins are, my two cousins are very light complected and they look like *kass'aqs*. [laughs] They're white, very light complected. So I have full Russian on my dad's side.

#18: Our children are with my one-eighth blood and hers [wife's] together, our children are almost half Russian. [laughs] It was something that I had to laugh about because people look at our kids and say why are they so light. [laughs] You know it comes from our Russian blood.

CJ: So how did you know you were Russian, did they tell you or how did you know about your grandparents?

#3: My family talk about them. I ask them how come they have curly hair. They say cause your uppa's hair is curly.

Even in my daughter's family, it is possible that her great-grandmother on her dad's side may have been part Russian, as she was described as a tall half-breed woman:

I don't know, half-breed woman, kinda red hair, my old man's mother. . . . That's the way my old man used to talk about it, half-breed. . . . And my dad's dad he found that woman. . . . She was tall woman, kind of white and tall.

Used to be. She was anyway tall. I don't know if she had brown hair. I see em, white hair, she was getting old already. She had long legs, she walk fast. My grandpa found em I guess, marry em I guess. (Jerabek, 2005, pp. 19-20)

Some people are very sensitive about their light skin, or the light skin of their children. I personally have heard people express concern that through intermarriage, their children looked less Native. Another person also stated that those children sometimes faced discrimination:

#12a: The unfortunate children of Russians were often picked on because of their light complexion.

Thus light skin, hair, or eyes was a distinguishing characteristic amongst a people with mostly black hair and eyes and brown skin. It is evidence of other European ancestry that sometimes was felt with pride, other times might have been the brunt of prejudice. Today European ancestry, including Russian ancestry is still used as an explanation for the difference in physical characteristics. For some, light coloring is in a way legitimized by the presence of Russian ancestry, as it provides an explanation. The importance of remembering ancestors and of passing that knowledge down to children is again stressed in these dialogues.

Maintenance of the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian Prayer and Song Books, Building of Churches, and Practicing Orthodox Religion

The most prevalent item brought up by those interviewed when talking about Russian heritage was the Russian Orthodox Church and Selaviq. Selaviq was discussed primarily in chapter 4. In this section I have included what people said about the importance of the Russian song and prayer books and building local churches. Father Michael Oleksa and Ray Collins, as well as other authors, have stressed the importance of locally built and maintained churches that carried on Orthodoxy with little outside support.

Religious identity was discussed earlier in this chapter when people talked about the mixing of Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Here people placed great significance on the maintenance of the tangible objects of Orthodoxy.

The use of the Russian language in services, the existence of Russian prayer and songbooks, and the ability of their ancestors to read and speak Russian were often brought up when talking about Russian heritage. This was a material link to their Russian past:

#2: They used to say that, my dad used to say that he had some Russian blood in him and he used to speak Russian and he used to write and read in Russian. I still have his church books written in Russian. . . . I only wish I could have kept on going with the Russian church books. I almost learned to read them in Russian. But I never do that long time. . . . Really I used to wonder how dad used to, he don't know how to write, he don't know any English, he don't know how to read in English or talk English, he would just be writing those Russian song books.

#12b: Russian Orthodox they sing Russian way. I hear them. . . . My mother-in-law had really, really old Russian Orthodox book, handwritten. They gave it to Father to look it up or something...She had it like in a notebook. Really old, old writings.

#3: Yes and we had the Russian Orthodox songs. But I don't know how to sing some Russian songs. Only by Selaviq I know some Russian songs. And when we bury people we sing Russian too some songs and some are in Easter time, Russian Christmas, Selaviq and Easter, and regular services. When they say in the name of the father, son . . . they say . . . that's Russian. Make sign of the cross. . . . When they say thank you they say it in Russian. My momma used to say your uppa used to say thank you in Russian.

#7: He [my dad] used to have a Russian book that was in Russian and I think my sister has that now since he passed away . . . a prayer book and it had all of the family names . . .

#11: A lot of the old like the elders there in Russian Mission, I could remember them reading from a church book that was all written in Russian and singing from a Russian written church book or songbook.

#18: Ya that's one thing that I noticed too that in my growing-up years I used to be able to see the elders read and write using the Cyrillic¹⁷ alphabet, the Russian alphabet, and they had church songs in that alphabet. . . . And I was taught to read that. . . . And when I was young, I just got out of high school, and he asked me if I wanted to learn how to lead the choir, the church, so he started to teach me what they call the . . . translations, when most of it was written by Father Iakov Netsvetov, and after he left another priest, I don't remember his last name, but I know his name was Father John. . . . He completed the translation. But what I noticed about that translation is that they use the upriver dialect, what I call the upriver dialect, for the church, but it hasn't been changed, cause we understand.

Some children growing up wore Sunday clothes that were very reminiscent of Russian dress. Here a woman describes a Sunday tradition when she was growing up, probably in the 1960s:

#7: I remember him [my dad] being very strict and we had strong things that we had to abide by, like every Sunday I had to wear a dress and have ribbons in my hair and if there was a priest I had to have ribbons on my dress also. And I couldn't just go to the church and come home and take them off, I had to wear them all day long. . . . I think it's a traditional dress. . . . I mean if the

¹⁷ The Cyrillic alphabet is the alphabet used by many Slavic peoples, chiefly those with a historical allegiance to the Orthodox Church. Ultimately derived from Greek uncials, it is now used for Russian, Bulgarian, Serbian, Ukrainian, and some other Slavic languages. The origin is the early 19th century, named after St. Cyril (on line Apple dictionary definition).

priest was up in Chuathbaluk, my dad always went up to Chuathbaluk and we would always go with him . . .

The use of ribbons is still an important part of the decoration on the shirt of star boys during Selaviq. A church leader once stated during a Selaviq sermon that the ribbons the star boys wear represent wings of an angel. As the star boy holds the twirling star they represent an angel.

Orthodox Church names are still used during baptism, just as was done in the early days of the church. In the early days, however, the names often replaced indigenous names. Today they serve as a baptismal name linking them to the Church:

#11: When a baby is baptized and doesn't have a "Church (Russian) Name," he/she is usually given one at the time of baptism. Not sure if the parents are involved in the picking of the name or if the priest suggests one. If they are given a Russian "Church" name, it is used as their Church name. It is given because in the Russian Orthodox religion you are given a "Name Day" and these are often found in the Russian Orthodox calendar. It doesn't replace any of their names.

Interestingly, many people also have "Native names," usually given to them by a family member. Often this name was one that another family member had, so the tradition of indigenous family names still occurs on a smaller scale:

#11: The "Native Name" giving is usually done informally by a family member, usually an elder. It is usually a name of someone who has recently passed on or a family member's name. I also notice that when a baby or young child is sick, he/she is usually "*merqeq*(ed)" and given a Native name. It's when someone in a way takes the sickness away from the child as he/she is sleeping and gives him/her a "Native Name."

Before [the Orthodox Church] a child was given a name and then after they sometimes especially in the mid river they may have been given a name of a person who died as a way of continuing family relationships, through passing that name on to a new generation. And that even governed their behavior the child among the Yup'iks, because if a child had your grandfather's name, you remembered their birthday and honored that person as you would have honored your grandfather in a way, so that was traditionally, but now the church names came in and they were all given a baptismal name that was one name the first generation and then succeeding generations at some point they became the family name. (R. L. Collins, personal communication, May 2013)

Oral tradition is the basis of learning for indigenous cultures. It is how cultural knowledge is passed from one generation to another. "Oral literature reflects what is important to us. In the absence of a written record, oral literature contains the history and transfers the wisdom of society" (MacLean, 2011, p. 4). This was the way that songs and prayers were learned in the Orthodox Church in the early days and still today, as people record songs from other villages and share them.

CJ: So when they were singing those old Russian Orthodox songs, is that how people learned them?

#23: Ya, especially around Bethel, Napaskiak, or whatever, not too far from Bethel, around there the old man used to teach. They call it, Matfe Borowski, or whatever his name was. . . . And they could, I guess some of them could still read Russian Orthodox. . . . They used to be some [old books]. That old man Kelila, not Russian way but I don't know how he would write Yupiaq words. He wrote them down and he sing them. I don't know how to read Russian Orthodox letters. . . . Orthodox that's how we learn, us. . . . I know the short, our father, like in Russian Orthodox.

Of course the most visible indication of Orthodoxy is the church itself. It is distinctive in the dome shape and cross. A photo of the Chuathbaluk church, which has been identified as one of the top ten Russian Orthodox sacred sites in Alaska, is included in chapter 2. People interviewed always mentioned if they had a family member who was involved in building the local Orthodox church. The construction was done voluntarily with people contributing their own time and money. This is another indication of the pride and dedication people have to their Russian ancestry.

#6: He's [my father] the one that built that church in Crooked Creek. Then it's way down now. . . . Met some people from Russia and they seemed to, they were amazed at what we had in church. They found some record books dating way back, song books. . . . I think my dad, they got so old, my dad had to copy some, but it's in the church. Probably get ahold of them somehow and make a copy . . . song books and prayer book.

#2: He did a lot of trapping and trading furs, that's how he built the church in Aniak with his trapping money. No donations, no volunteers, no fundraisers. There was these couples that used to live in Aniak. . . . those two couples were Russians. They used to write for him to order those icons and church bell that's on the side of the church now. And it was built maybe 1947.

#5: You know my grandpa bring that Russian church down there [Lower Kalskag]. It never rot, the corners, it still standing, that new one is back there, that new one. My uppa made a blueprint how to make that Russian church, that old one, that's second one, there was a little church before then they make that one that's standing yet. They make that new one. Me and my sister, we was telling some people when she used to talk, say how my uppa made that blueprint he make that church, see in Sitka I remember we would all kneel down and I would be almost sleeping cause the prayers those days would be long.

#14: He [Uppa Sam Phillips] and my dad [and others], I think all of his sons too helped to build that church that is there now [in Chuathbaluk].

#23: [In Aniak] that old man Kelila, build it for this, when we come down from up there. He used to pick up my brother, oldest brother, he bring them out logging after break up for the church and he saw them up, make lumber out of them. Start working in 40s, like 43. I knew the building was just built, nothing inside, just small icons, when they start to build up. I always feel bum sometimes, it's falling apart.

When you walk into a Russian church, even a small village church, the most striking aspect are the old Russian icons. The icons are usually flat panel paintings depicting a holy being or object, commonly Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Saints, or Angels. Many are golden and seem to glow in the light. Every Russian Orthodox home also has a wall with icons that is decorated with ribbons and bows during the Selaviq celebration and often illuminated by Christmas lights and a candle. An icon also is at the center of the spinning Selaviq star. The old icons are a great source of pride for each local church and sometimes almost mystical.

#23: Those big icons that's what they donated to church. Russia when they build up the first church, you know those icons. . . . They donate the icons. When I first went in the church, I was, I don't know how old I was, maybe eight, nine years old. I get so embarrassed, I thought they were two, like they were going to walk, those icons. It was just the icon.

#11: A lot of the church icons in Russian Mission, we call this lady our aunt but her mom was my mom's aunt. She was married to a Bel'kov and the Bel'kov family brought a lot of the icons over from Russia way back, maybe in the late 1800s and around there.

Icons are an integral part of Orthodoxy. I have noticed that in many Orthodox homes, windows and doors have an icon or cross as a form of protection. Black (2004) and Oleksa (1992) both describe the use of icons:

Some modern scholars maintain that just as the body cross was accepted by the Natives as a protective talisman, and the priest assumed aspects of the shaman's role, the icon became a functional equivalent of the mask that provided a window into the worlds of the spirits and of the Spirit. (Black 2004, p. 229)

Icons re-present—make present again—the eternally significant events and persons of sacred history. . . . So central to the Orthodox faith is the veneration of icons that the day designated to celebrate the restoration of icons each year is called the Sunday of Orthodoxy. . . . The church building itself is an icon of the Kingdom, for the Church community is perceived ideally as the presence of that reality. (Oleksa, 1992, pp. 63, 69)

For some, the many church rules were a source of confusion. As we have seen in the past, there was little instruction in the intricacies of Orthodox dogma. People depended on the old ways of doing things to continue the church traditions.

Although some rules are difficult to understand, many of the traditions are uplifting:

#14: I was for a long time disappointed in the church because I never understood it. And when I'd ask the questions about why do we do this, why do women have to do this, why do we have to, there are so many you can'ts, and yes you can, and no you can't do this. I would ask the question of why and nobody seemed to know. Then my mom, I asked her, then why do you go to church then if you don't understand it? "It's because we were brought up that way." And a lot of strict rules and a lot of things that went along with it. And there's a lot of good things too. It's just the time. I love the way we celebrate Christmas for instance and Easter. I think those are the only two

things I love about the church because it seems to bring people together, those two very important holidays.

CJ: Now I'm familiar with Selaviq, the Christmas. . . . Now what do you do special for Easter?

#14: My goodness you, it's a bright day. You celebrate from the time you get up in the morning until you go to bed, until it gets dark. Your house is open. That's how it is, your house is open all day for whomever wants to come in and eat, come in and celebrate and visit. It is a day of rejoicing. It's just like Selaviq.

One person in particular has taken it upon herself to learn more about Orthodoxy and in so doing has found the link to Russian traditions and the "why" behind certain beliefs and teachings:

#16: For me I guess the main reason I started learning is that I used to work. . . . and I used to serve people. And a lot of the people had issues with Orthodoxy, we can't do this, we can't do that. Especially if someone kills their self, we're not going to pray for them, we can't and this and that, whatever. So a lot of people had resentments toward Orthodoxy, or the church I should say, that because I was in a helping profession field I had to learn about it and teach them and educate them. And when I was learning about it so that they wouldn't have issues I saw that it pertains to me. I'm Orthodox, so I had to, after I got out of, after I resigned from my position and moved to Fairbanks, I continued trying to learn, and you know it's just little steps, trying to buy as much books as I can, not to say that I read them all, I skimmed through them, and I couldn't understand, I couldn't make the connection in my brain, and so when I was researching I found the ancient faith radio and I started, you know it's free downloads. . . . There are so many things that I would have to learn about cause a lot of the things that we are told. I'll use suicide as an example. We're told that when a person kills their self the church is totally

incapable of praying for them. You know that brings resentments from the family members toward the church. You know there's a lot of people that have that resentment. But on ancient faith radio when Father Thomas Hopko was talking about suicide, and the reason that we don't pray for them, it makes sense.

CJ: One thing I find interesting is that Orthodoxy out here is such a blend of Orthodox and Yup'ik. I mean there is kind of a blending of traditions and beliefs I think from some of the old beliefs in Yup'ik. Do you find that too?

#16: Well, um, some things that I thought were culturally related were, cause we are not taught that it is part of the church, or tradition of the church, we think it's culture. I don't know all of them, but I know there is a certain feast day that we always have to have, some kind of like flowers or branches or not Easter but a different holiday. When I went to Russia and I have a video of the kids dancing, with branches and father Macarie was saying that that dance is actually a part of Orthodox tradition, something to do with branches, and I'm totally ignorant still.

For some, there is the dedication to keeping the Orthodox Church alive despite those who view it as just an ancient church.

#18: With the church I think it will take a lot of training, a lot of work to keep it going. Now days once in a while I'd hear small talk that the Russian Orthodox Church is a museum church. Which it's not, it's really alive.

CJ: I never heard that before, where was that coming from?

#18: Ah, It come from the urban areas, like Anchorage. I guess people who don't understand.

CJ: From the non-Orthodox people in urban areas?

#18: Ya.

Changes in the Orthodox Church after the sale of Alaska are discussed briefly in chapter 2. When I asked if people knew about any changes that occurred with the sale of Alaska, I expected to hear that people felt abandoned. That wasn't always the case:

CJ: But I always thought it must have been like pulling the rug out from under them if they no longer had this support of the traveling priests and all of that if they had to manage their own churches at that time. Have you heard anything about that or is that not the case?

Well, I think most of the priests by that time were Native Alaskans so I don't think they left. They were Yup'ik priests and were recruiting priests right along and training them and training local readers. Even up in Nikolai the services were conducted by local people in that they trained local people to read and part of the role of the church, was the priest, the chief, the first chief, actually did the preaching in Nikolai. He would talk to the people and encourage them about attending church and helping one another and so on. That was what the sermons were around and those were conducted by local people. So in Nikolai even without the priest they had services right along. There was a reader in there that would read and they had adopted the Russian songs, adopted the Slavie, which I guess died out in other areas in Russia and so on but up here the festivities around Christmas were all carried on by local people. And also in Nikolai they built their own churches and monetarily they weren't dependent on, there was local labor and money that built those and when they wanted a priest they paid for their travel up here. Like when we came in and I think that pattern started early on, so in a sense the churches that they left behind were self-supporting. They weren't dependent on that outside income because very early on local people were supporting and contributing, building, and becoming leaders in the church and so on. As opposed to during the American era there often missionaries came in with outside support and outside money and built the churches and

they didn't, they weren't able to bring the local people into the church that quickly to take over leadership roles. So they were dependent on outside clergy, the Catholics and the Anglicans and so on. Whereas in the Orthodox Church they recruited local people and they were involved in conducting the services. I think that was the difference. (R. L. Collins, personal communication, May 2013)

#17: I think most of them [Russians] stayed [after the sale of Alaska] that were up here, like my mom's dad probably stayed. I'm not sure of that at all, because she never told us much about her family.

#18: Ya the local people were in charge of the church and took care of it, best as they could. The church is still alive today. They [the church leaders] were called the *toyons* and the *toyon's* responsibility was to advise the priest when he arrives, who needs to be baptized, if they were baptized by a layman and who needs to get married, or all those things. He was more like a reference person.

CJ: Did they conduct some services too while the priest was gone?

#18: Yes there are readers, what we call reader's services.

One elder I interviewed said that she did hear something about the sale of Alaska:

#5: They never told me about how they lived but we always listened to them talking about Russian. . . . My dad used to say Russian about Alaska. He tell us about it. He tell us Russian sold Alaska.

CJ: Did they say anything about how things changed after they sold Alaska?

#5: No they mentioned about it something they have to keep it—we're not supposed to listen to those kind of things.

One interviewee, who grew up living with his Russian grandfather, said that people were glad when the Russians left. It is interesting to note that the Grandfather expressed that opinion. It may be that by that time, he felt much more affinity to the local people than to the Russians:

#6: Most of the people were relieved because you know because they say the Russians came through and they shoot their guns and knock a tree down and they didn't want that to happen. That's what my grandpa told me. They didn't want nothing to do with them.

CJ: But your grandpa was Russian?

#6: Ya. He was married with my grandma. I don't know how the hell he got ahold of her. [laughs] Thanks to him I'm here. Right now I don't know, lots of those people moved around. Lots of them weren't even married and now that they are gone they got grandkids running around.

Father Michael Oleksa described the importance of local church traditions: "They can do it their way, preserve some of their local customs. And that's perfectly okay, that's the only way the church has survived with this indigenous, this rootedness" (M. J. Oleksa, personal communication, April 2013).

The most important tangible thing people brought up in the discussion of Russian influence in the middle Kuskokwim region was the presence of Russian song and church books and the importance of their maintenance. This was a material, visible link to their Russian past. The use of Russian language in the services and songs was also important to maintain, even if the precise translation was not known. In this instance the use of Russian has become part of the oral tradition, as songs and prayers are learned orally and if written down, are written with English syllables to aid in the pronunciation. Adults also remember very strict Sunday services and observances in the home, complete with special Sunday dress. The continuation of giving Orthodox names is still a part of baptism, as is the giving of Native names.

There is also a great sense of pride in the churches themselves with their distinctive crosses and domes. If a new church is built, the old icons are moved into the new church, many of them being the original icons from when the first village Orthodox church was built. Families always talked about their proud heritage of a father, grandfather, or other relative who built the first Orthodox village church with no outside assistance or funding.

Each Orthodox village has their own unique ways of doing services or celebrations such as Selavliq, which has preserved the church's "indigenous rootedness."

Still, people also expressed regret that they didn't understand Orthodoxy as well as they wanted to, having a hard time just accepting it "because we were brought up that way." Some took it upon themselves to understand more about the religion.

People did not have a lot of first-hand knowledge about how the church or Alaska may have changed after the sale, but they felt that for the most part locally they were able to maintain their churches and beliefs. Some Russian ancestors told their grandchildren they were glad the Russians left. The comment from one elder that "we're not supposed to listen to those kind of things" could indicate that there was a discussion that her parents did not want her to hear, perhaps over concern about the sale. It also helps illustrate that children were not supposed to question their parents or elders. This sign of respect, not to question your elders, was brought up by others also in their interviews.

Summary

As stated in chapter 3, my analytic process for examining the transcribed interviews involves three steps:

1. Thematic identification: identify recurring themes in the interviews
2. Focus on resonant narratives around identity using people's own words

3. Theoretical framework for analysis: examine the actual narratives to determine a model for what identity means in the middle Kuskokwim

This chapter summarizes key portions of my interviews, centering on people's Russian heritage and indigenous identity. Their verbatim accounts focused on shared topics around which common themes were identified.

In talking about Russian heritage, people were asked if they had Russian ancestors and how they were related, how did they find out about their Russian ancestry, what was their life like, how did they feel about their Russian ancestry, if their children knew about their ancestry, and what was important to pass down to them.

From those and other open-ended questions, the following themes are identified as being important components of identity:

- blending of indigenous Native groups in the area, principally Yup'ik and Athabascan;
- blending of Catholicism and Orthodoxy in many families;
- influence of the Holy Cross Catholic mission;
- physical characteristics that often identified Russian ancestry; and
- importance of maintenance of the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian prayer and song books, building of churches, practicing Orthodox religion.

My literature review is a foundation for the examination of identity in the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska. When looking at identity, we must take a multilayered approach. Traditional values focusing around practicing Native traditions, knowledge of family tree, respect for land and nature, honoring ancestors, and spirituality are key elements of identity. Root's (1992a) view of identity as an interwoven approach, takes into consideration the interaction of societal, familial, and individual variables within the context of history (p. 182) fits in well with the focus of my study. Adding to that, Kawagley's (1995) tetrahedral framework of triangulation between the natural, spiritual, and human realm (p. 16) reminds us of the importance of balance and inter-relationships. A variety of

cultural identifiers, including place, ethnicity, and religion, all contribute to a person's identity. Historical influences on identity through outside contact also greatly contribute to a person's sense of self.

In developing my own theoretical framework I found elements of some Western approaches to be useful, including syncretism, transculturation, cultural resiliency, and constructivist grounded theory. However, my indigenous framework also includes elements that are not usually considered to be a part of the Western theory, such as the balance between the natural, spiritual, and human realms; interpersonal relationships; place; and traditional values.

Nevertheless, syncretism, transculturation, and cultural resiliency can be helpful when looking at change.

Syncretism is an anthropological theory that describes the way divergent cultures converge and share and in essence create their own hybrid that bridges the gap between the old and the new. In the middle Kuskokwim, Yup'ik and Athabascan cultures blended, Creoles served as cultural brokers, and indigenous beliefs were woven into the Russian Orthodox Church. The adaption of the Russian Orthodox religion to the local context occurred in part because the day-to-day operation of the church was initially often left to the local indigenous converts (Olekse, personal communication, 2013; Stewart, 1999).

As previously stated, Boraas and Leggett (2013) go farther by stating that "Orthodoxy was highly indigenized. . . . Orthodoxy was incorporated into indigenous beliefs rather than indigenous beliefs subsumed into Orthodoxy" (p. 487). This respect for ancient practices and beliefs has allowed the church to remain strong today and the "way the church has survived with this indigenous, this rootedness" (M. J. Olekse, personal communication, April 2013).

Transculturation, which is similar to syncretism, can also describe the continuous two-way borrowing and learning between cultures. Transculturation is not just the transition from one culture to another. Rather, it merges these concepts and creates a new cultural condition.

I have also found that resilience as a theoretical approach helps explain cultural adaptation and survival. Change is a part of cultural adaptation. Change can also be the successful solution to a problem. When indigenous peoples are confronted by an outside incursion that threatens their way of life and very existence, cultural resilience helps explain how individuals and societies have endured and responded to changing conditions. A resilient culture can maintain and develop cultural identity, knowledge and practices despite challenges and difficulties. Thus cultural resiliency takes the form of positive adaptation despite adversity.

Indigenous cultures in the middle Kuskokwim have undergone multiple adaptations over time in order to survive. Through all of this, cultural identity and values were at the core of this survival. The importance of place, ancestral relationships, and balance between the natural, spiritual, and human realms helped anchor people throughout this change. Where my research in middle Kuskokwim identity diverges from other work has been the focus on the indigenous rootedness.

When considering an indigenous approach to research, the aspect of constructivist grounded theory that I find most applicable is the emphasis on the relationship between the researcher and the participant. The value that the researcher places on the information received from those he or she is working with fits in well with an indigenous approach to research and Wilson's emphasis on respect, reciprocity, and relationality. As I work through the data, I have found it very insightful to check back with several of the people I've interviewed. Asking for additional information and clarification has proven invaluable. As previously mentioned, this is also part of Tedlock's emphasis on discourse as a continuing process built on openness and critical appraisal as well as sensitivity to multiple perspectives.

In chapter 6 the analysis of interview data continues, centering on the modern-day events that have affected Russian and indigenous identity.

Chapter 6: Analysis of Interview Data, Modern-Day Events Affecting Russian and Indigenous Identity

Introduction

As stated in chapter 5, I interviewed twenty-six individuals using open-ended, semistructured interviews focused around people's heritage. Interviews were transcribed word-for-word, from which shared topics were identified. Chapter 6, like chapter 5, includes discussions around the common themes found in the interviews, voicing resonant narratives, with theoretical analysis.

Although chapter 5 included some discussion of historical events that occurred in the later part of the 19th century, after the sale of Alaska, this chapter 6 deals with more modern day events effecting identity in the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska.

In this chapter the following themes are identified as being important components of identity. Each one of the themes includes key narratives:

- knowledge of Russian foods and words that have become part of the Native culture;
- stories about Russians;
- influence of the Cold War on Russian identity;
- distinction between Russian and White/Caucasian ancestry;
- advantages or disadvantages for Russian ancestors; and
- effect of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood on how people identify themselves.

As previously stated, my research is done through an ethnohistorical approach that combines the use of historical documentation as well as people's oral history, always keeping in mind Wilson's three Rs, respect, reciprocity, and relationality. Again hearing people's voice is emphasized through the use of

narrative dialogues. The Yup'ik and Athabascan cultural values, as listed at the beginning of chapter 5 are also applicable to chapter 6.

Knowledge of Russian Foods and Words That Have Become Part of the Native Culture

A very popular discussion point was Russian foods that are still popular today. People think of these foods as coming from Russian tradition but now they are considered “Native food.” The first thing anyone thinks about is Russian pie. Russian pie is a savory pie made principally with salmon, many times *sulunaq* (salted salmon), rice, and sometimes onions or other vegetables in a pastry crust. It is a favorite at potlucks and Selaviq. Also brought up was a sweetened “church rice” and Russian bread baked especially around Easter. *Akutaq* was also mentioned. *Akutaq* is sometimes referred to as “Eskimo ice cream” and today in the middle Kuskokwim is usually a combination of Crisco, sugar, whitefish, oil, and berries. I have made *akutaq* many times and use the Crisco and whitefish method. I have also tasted it with more traditional uses of animal fats. In the past, and sometimes still today, moose or bear fat is used in the mid-river area. Other areas of the state used seal oil or another kind of fat. It may be that this was adapted from a more traditional Yup'ik dish of fat and berries. The addition of sugar may have come from the Russians or later in the American era.

#2: The stuff that we used to eat was mostly from the land. I don't know why they call this Russian pie. My dad used to say they were taught by their ancestors how to make that Russian pie and that's the only thing that they know when I was growing up, Russian pie. No cake, no pies, only Russian pie.

#14: Fish pie.

CJ: Like Russian pie. Did they call it Russian pie?

#14: *Puroga*—that's Russian. I think the *sulunaq* came from them too. I think so.

#15: Well the only thing I know about is Russian pie, that's about the only. I wonder about *sulunaq*, salt fish.

#11: I think like the Russian pie, the *biluk*. . . . We say *biluk* and I think they say *pulik* in Russian. So you can kind of hear the resemblance.

CJ: Is there some kind of Easter bread that you were talking about?

#11: Oh the *kulich*? Is the Russia Easter bread and it is a special bread that you make mainly around the Russian Easter season. It has a lot more fruits added to it and you bake them in a can so top is a dome shape like the domes of the church.

#12b: And like rice, they add sugar to it and raisins, something like that. I know my mother-in-law used to make those kinds.

CJ: This bread [you mentioned] did they make it on any holidays?

#12a: Like when they are going to have communion.

#12b: I think the father makes those.

#12a: It's like unleavened bread, something like that.

#11: I'm sure a lot of the preserving was taught to the Natives by Russian, like the *sulunaq* [salted fish]

One of the most interesting discussions of Russian food focused around the "church rice." Rice of course is also commonly used in the Russian pie discussed above and is often a primary ingredient in all sorts of "Native" soup. But the discussion of this church rice was new to me:

#7: The rice at the church, I can't remember what it is called right now, but the rice is Russian.

CJ: They had rice at the church?

#7: The rice with raisins, like a rice pudding. It was real sweet.

CJ: Like as part of the service or after the service?

#7: As part of the service. It would be when the priest was there only.

CJ: And like this rice that your mother in law used to make, did she make it at any special holidays or anything?

#12b: Im hmm. Like conference time, holidays for the church, our namesake days. . . . Like they were named after that person that passed away.

#23: When they have communion they make a rice to remember the soul of their loved ones departed.

CJ: Did they make it special somehow that rice, did they put special stuff in it?

#23: They just cook the rice and they use raisins to decorate the top and put little crosses they bless it.

CJ: So was it kind of sweet, that rice?

#23: Ah, seemed like they used to after it cook that rice, they work it and then put sugar or something.

The most complete description of the memorial church rice came from a young woman who remembered her father explaining it to her. Here once again, the traditional Native value of remembering ancestors is manifested in an Orthodox tradition:

#13b: I guess I would call it like memorial rice, the rice that you remember the people that have passed and Easter bread, Russian Orthodox Easter bread. It's just like a regular loaf of bread but then the sweetness you add to it, is like the sweetness of life, and it's a homemade frosting you put on the top and you represent, you can put a Russian Orthodox cross on there and everything, it has different meanings. When you make the Russian Orthodox rice, it's rice, but you don't use minute rice or anything rice that can be cooked really fast. You use the regular rice, you don't cook it all the way. You cook it where it's halfway cooked, when it's still a little bit hard but still soft on the outside. Some families put honey or sugar or decorate with raisins and it represents like the sweetness of life, and almost like the rice is like the

hardness when you lost someone. It's hard to describe, but the texture of the rice, the way it tastes in your mouth. It's sweet and then it's not bitter, like a hard casing, cause you remember the people, the souls that are gone. It's pretty amazing, you gotta listen to the old people, the way they, cause they would tell us in Yugstun [sic]. In Yup'ik they would tell us when we were growing up, my mom and dad would tell us these stories in Yup'ik. And you're trying to get that language barrier across cause you grow up trying to understand your parents cause they talk to you constantly in Yup'ik and then you go to school, so we kind of have that, translation barrier, that's what it is, try and describe it in my words, but it sounds so good when your parents describe it. They use these Yup'ik words that are so hard to find the English word for them, at least that's what I think.

One of the people I interviewed checked with a local Orthodox priest for more information on this church rice:

First off it wasn't rice to begin with it is to be "wheat" and since they found some wheat (seeds) in coffin with one of the rulers dating back to 1,000 of years before Christ and that seed still sprung into life; hence wheat should be used . . . from grain to wheat. . . . and since in Orthodoxy we believe Christ is Eternal and we believe He is Life itself we really do not die, and the wheat reminds us that our belief in Him (Jesus) in itself eternal so we pray for/with our departed not that they have died but that they are "alive in Jesus Christ." Most simplest explanation I could come up with. . . . Yes those who are Orthodox Christian are alive in Him therefore we pray for as much as we pray with them in the presence of God together.

Talking about traditional foods also brought up some humorous remembrances:

#13a: I remember being at your mom and dad's house, I was really small and I was crying for pie and they gave me Russian pie and I said I don't want this, it's not pie. [laughs] But I had to eat it. Another time I was crying for jello and they gave me moose jello. No more crying for food. [laughs]

CJ: And what's the moose jello, when it gets gelatinous?

#13b: No, they use moose hooves.

CJ: And is it sweet then, do they make it sweet?

#13a: I don't eat it so I don't know.

#13b: It has nothing to do with sweetness. I guess they call it moose jello cause they seen regular jello. I don't know the Native word for moose jello, my brothers probably do. It's just cause it jiggles. [laughs]

CJ: Does it have meat in it too?

#13b: Ya it's just that the moose hooves boil down and they are soft enough so that you could scrape them out and you eat the insides. That's what the jelly part is and you could put potatoes and rice and noodles. It's almost like a Russian pie but without the dough. [laughs]

Language is also an important indicator of identity, and I have included language as a bubble on my identity framework. Krauss (1980) states that language is the most essential part of culture. "I do not know to what extent a culture, an identity, a nation, can survive without its own language" (p. 89). There are only a small percentage of fluent Yugtun speakers in the middle Kuskokwim region, and no speakers of Russian; however, Yugtun and Russian words that have been incorporated into Yugtun are still a part of language use, providing ties to ancestral roots. Culture and identity may have been affected by the loss of language fluency but still remain strongly indigenous.

There are many Yup'ik words that are Russian or taken from the Russian. The Russians of course brought in items for which there was no Yup'ik word (Krauss, 1980). Some of those interviewed were familiar with this:

#18: Ya we have a lot of borrowed Russian words for the things that we have that our people didn't have before the arrival of the Russians like the cups and the sugar and the flour, coffee, and the tea, all of the basic necessities. Cause they weren't needed.

#7: And we were looking at the Yup'ik language and we see the Russian loan words that we always knew, but it might be because of the Yup'ik language . . . and they were like *saarralaq* (sugar), all that.

#15: And I'm sure he know of other tools and things that they gave them that we didn't know of that was introduced to our people. Like we never had barrels so they started putting those salt fish in the barrels and we should still use barrels because they are safer than plastic.

Another Orthodox custom is for women to cover their heads in church. Russian women also wear similar scarfs to those worn by Native Orthodox women. Many of the Yup'ik elder women also wear long skirts in church.

#11: And some of the traditions. I'm not sure if they're directly linked to the church or from Russia but when women get married they have to use the scarf or some type of head covering when they go to church.

#7: I wonder if *pelatuuk* [scarf] is a Russian loan word? I never even looked that up to see if it was. But they wear the scarfs and all that and the dresses. When you go to the bilingual conference you do see the Russians selling the scarfs and their skirts and stuff remind me of how people used to dress a long time ago here. And you look even the younger people just covering their head and wearing the backs sometimes, but here the young people don't use *pelatuuks* so much.

CJ: When you go into church, and I don't know if it is enforced that much now?

#7: It isn't enforced much now.

CJ: The women had to cover their heads?

#7: Ya they had to cover their heads if they were married. And the young people who weren't married, they didn't have to wear a *pelatuuk*. But they could wear a *pelatuuk*. But the people who were married had to wear a *pelatuuk*.

CJ: I've also seen these little lace kind of things sometimes too.

#7: I don't know too much about the lace stuff. I never was curious enough to ask about it, I just thought they were pretty.

Today's "traditional" foods of the middle Kuskokwim include items that are indigenous as well as Russian such as Russian pie. Others such as the very popular *akutaq* is probably an adaptation of a more traditional Native dish. Another traditional Orthodox food described to me was "memorial church rice," representing both the sweetness of life and the hardness when you lose someone. Even the salted preserved fish known as *sulunaq* is an adaptation from indigenous storage techniques. Salt was introduced as a preservative, maybe by the Russians or later by other immigrants or Americans. Russian words have been readily accepted into the Yup'ik and other Alaska indigenous languages where no indigenous word existed. And other Russian customs such as women covering their heads at church or wearing long dresses continue to be done, especially by elders of the Orthodox faith.

Stories About Russians

When people were asked if they heard any stories about when the Russians were here, a variety of accounts emerged. One family had a detailed story of their first Russian ancestor arriving in Alaska, thanks to one of the family members who did research while in a college class.

#8: My great-great-grandfather, Nicholai Dementov, came from Russia. He was born in 1838 or '39. He lived near Moscow and he came to America and Alaska. My sister heard from Lydia Black that there was a letter where the

mom said send my son back to me. Or that he was lost, not lost, that he ran away. He is listed as 20 but it seemed like he may have lied about his age so he could leave home and travel to Alaska. The governor of Russia received a letter from his mom and she wanted the governor to send her son back to Moscow. He never went back and now there's thousands of us here. . . . [I think he came] just for adventure and because the Russians were doing all the gathering furs and trading. Probably just wanted an adventure and took off. . . . It talks about how my great-great-grandfather came over from Russia. The captain sent six men to shore for water and supplies and they never returned so he sent another boat of men out and they never returned so the ship went back to Russia. . . . My great-great-grandfather was on the second boat sent ashore. He settled on the Kuskokwim River. He began working at the trading store in 1862 for the Russian American Company. He began managing a trading store at Kolmakovskiy on the left bank of the Kuskokwim River in 1862. And it looks like the site was abandoned in 1866 so he was there right at the end of it [the Russian era]. He was hired in 1870 by Reinhold Separe to work in Vinasale. . . . My great-grandfather was born at Kolmakovskiy. Then in 1897 he went to Holy Cross. So he was a carpenter, hunter, fisher, and boat pilot on the St. Joseph. He moved from Kolmakovskiy to Holy Cross, he stayed, I think the church was just starting up then and he helped them build the church and everything. So that's probably when he became a Catholic.

As previously noted in chapter 5, the Demientieff family was involved in construction for both the Catholic as well as Moravian missions. Another family also knew of how their Russian ancestor came into the region.

#12b: I might say it wrong, but the way he [my father-in-law] said, his dad used to tell story about Russians. They said they moved around and they end up by Mount McKinley and from Mount McKinley they start coming down.

And probably stopped at Nikolai, that's how they got that Nikolai name. They were like, he was saying they were running away from Russians a long time ago. They used to have war or something. They got the Savage name.

#20: It sound like his dad was full or part [Russian], cause they were. It start out with his grandpa N . . . S . . . used to live in Mount McKinley area they used to come from Russia somewhere then they end up around Mount McKinley area and come move downriver. He end up being in this one area and my great grandpa was staying in Yukon and I don't know somehow it form into a village they name it Nikolai village. My dad was telling me those stories and coming down the Yukon River. . . . He used to, he used to talk about army and Yukon area where they work on the barges, army around Fairbanks somewhere, they used to work on the barges and just work or whatever they do in those days. He used to be a chief.

#17: But I think he [my great-grandfather] ran away from the Russian army, if I'm right. I may be wrong but when the United States bought Russia cause it's very close from Dillingham to McGrath to walk over, that way. My great-grandfather he started that village above McGrath, Nikolai. That was his homestead. And he was always away from people and he moved, hunting, he moved around. But I know that that village up there Nikolai is originally my great-grandfather's homestead. . . . Cause he ran away from, that's if he ran away from there. That's where he homestead and from there. My grandpa said he was born around Mount McKinley. And they moved down to Yukon River and finally end up in Holy Cross.

The above three interviews were from three family members who told of their Russian ancestor coming from Mount McKinley area, Nikolai, and then to the Yukon. Two of the interviewees also stated that they had heard he ran away from

the Russian army. This is a family narrative and has been passed down orally. The actual existence of a Russian army can only be documented in Sitka and later at the mouth of Cook Inlet. According to Dr. Katherine Arndt:

The only contingent of Russian army that was in Alaska consisted of 100 members of the Siberian Line Battalion, sent to Sitka in 1854 to protect against any hostilities that might arise in connection with the Crimean War. Following a Tlingit attack on Sitka in 1855, an additional 100 men of the Siberian Line Battalion were sent there in 1856. The soldiers were based in Sitka, with 17 detailed to the coal mine at the mouth of Cook Inlet (Coal Bay, Port Graham) in 1856. The number at the coal mine was as high as 21 a few years later, and then declined up until the mine was closed in 1862. At least 60 of the soldiers were withdrawn from the colonies in 1863, and by 1865 their number had dwindled to 93, all in Sitka (the force was maintained at this level in Sitka through 1867). As far as I know, there was never a Russian army contingent stationed near Dillingham. There was certainly never one in the vicinity of Mt. McKinley because the Russians didn't have any posts there at all. (K. L. Arndt, personal communication, December 2013)¹⁸

Although we cannot document the existence of a Russian army in the area described, the travel from the Mount McKinley area could have been part of an annual subsistence pattern. Collins (2004) reports that the people of the upper Kuskokwim often hunted in the Alaska Range (pp. 118, 16-23).

¹⁸ This information, as summarized by Dr. Katherine Arndt, is from Richard A. Pierce, *Builders of Alaska: The Russian Governors, 1818-1867* (Kingston, Ont.: Limestone Press, 1986, pp. 39, 42, 46); the Sitka parish confessional lists, 1857-1867 (Alaskan Russian Church Archives Records, [microfilmed by Library of Congress, Washington, DC, 1984], reel 265); and the Kenai parish confessional lists, 1856-1862 (Alaskan Russian Church Archives Records, [microfilmed by Library of Congress, Washington, DC, 1984], reel 197).

I asked Ray Collins if Chief Nikolai had any connection to the Russian army. He provided additional information on the family history and links to the Kuskokwim region, which included information on a raid that forced Chief Nikolai to leave the area. Although the raid did not involve the Russian army, it is possible that information on this skirmish has somehow been combined with Russian ancestry, leading to the family narrative described above:

I don't think Chief Nikolai is the Russian runaway. Chief Nikolai was Athabaskan. He lived on the Innoko River. His brother was killed in a raid that was in retaliation for something he had done. They let Nikolai go but he feared they might return so he took his family and hid his trail by taking a roundabout way to the Kuskokwim via the mountains at the head of the Innoko. He contacted the upper Kuskokwim people at the mouth of the Tonzona (now Little Tonzona) and settled there. He became the chief of that village and was there when Spur came through in 1898. He mentions Nikolai in his report. His wife could have been from the upper Kuskokwim, which would explain why he moved there. He would have been originally from the Holikachuk people on the upper Innoko. There were contacts between the Georgetown area and the Innoko so they could have been related that way. He had two sons, Nikolai and Deaphon, and their children took these names as their last name so there are now two families in Nikolai related to Chief Nikolai. (R. L. Collins, personal communication, December 2013)

Other interviewees told stories of when the Russians first came into the country:

#12a: I heard just recently that it had not been for our Native people, the Russians that immigrated to Alaska would not have made it without our people, without their help to get food and stuff. I can't remember who told me that, but someone, that if it weren't for our people the Russians might have not made it on their own. They'd starve, die of starvation.

#12a: Back in the day when, I heard a story when the *kass'aqs* came, it might have been the Russians, that they have pale faces and different color hair. When they first came into the village the kids were just in awe of them and they were passing out pilot crackers but the kids didn't know what they were, they were giving the crackers, there was a language barrier. They were speaking their language and of course they had the Yup'ik language and they couldn't communicate. But these guys, these *kass'aq* guys handed out the crackers to the kids and they didn't know what they were because of the language barrier and they were playing with them. They played for days, just throwing them around, cause they were round and kinda hard. Throwing them around and playing with them and they didn't know they were edible.

As referenced previously in this chapter, many of the Russians who came to Alaska were Native Siberians. The interviewee whose father longed to go back to Siberia also talked about reindeer herding, ordering special chocolate, and his different ways:

#14: They used to take care of a lot of reindeer and stuff. . . . He even had a pair of mukluks . . . from Siberia. They were very different because they don't, they're very plain, nothing fancy about them. I never seen any kind mukluks like that in our area, usually ours have different designs and they have um . . . tassels and things like that. These ones didn't, all they had was just the boot itself and the thing like this on the side and to tie and that was it. They were reindeer and the leg part. [The sole was] smoked moose. . . . He did say he was there though, Siberia. And he always ordered this special kind of chocolate and it come from Siberia and it was quite different. Some kind of chocolate bar and he would keep it, and they weren't very big, about this maybe [4 inches] and the height was about that, and they would be in little blocks, but they tasted pretty good though. Only once in a great while he

would break a piece and he'd let me have a piece. It was very different. Very very different, and very good. . . . I think he had some Yup'ik in him or Siberian Native. I really think he came from Siberia. His ways were different. His ways of thinking, his ways of doing things were a little bit different. . . . His culture was different, but his techniques as far as hunting and trapping to me were pretty much the same, but his drive, his drive was really strong. Always um doing something . . . [also] the way he talked. His accent was very different. I didn't notice that until after I came back from Wrangell. Ya dad you are kinda different. And I could see, I didn't understand, I knew that there was something because of the way other, my cousins and my aunts, just the way they treated him I guess. And I finally asked him "how come they treat you so different," and he would laugh and he would say, "I don't know. Cause I'm different." And I would say "oh that's ok." It [his Yup'ik] was different, a whole different, even when he spoke English...the way he pronounced, like "oh you" you know his speaking, "oh you come." But when he says the "oh you come" the accent is quite different.

Although no one had specific stories of the Russians treating people in the middle Kuskokwim harshly, some thought that the contact was not always peaceful and that the contact forever changed their ancestors:

#14: Sometimes I think the Russian people were kind of mean cause I don't know maybe they don't mean to be mean but just because they were very harsh I think to the people here in Alaska. . . . That goes back to the question of how was our people like before they came, before they came to us, because of all the stuff that happened. Way back in the days, the abuse, there was a lot of abuse, not that it seems to be any different these days sometimes. . . . They were like slaves, they treated our people like slaves to them, getting the furs that they wanted and they took advantage of our people because we were not educated, the way that they saw education. And they and whatever culture

we had of our own, they probably stripped that too, and pushed their culture on our people. And I don't know that for a hundred percent, but that's how I feel.

CJ: Did your dad ever say anything about that, or any hints, or your uppa or anybody?

#14: Somehow I think they felt that way. And I am glad that not all of our people are that mean because to this day, I never did see uppa ever lift a hand, or my uncle. There's some that that was the only way to deal with things, was through anger, and I didn't know, my question was where did that come from? So it had to be introduced somehow, somewhere, so I think they were mistreated, ya. That's it I think. That's just how I feel, I wonder, and the older I get I wonder what kind of people were we. I think at one time we were very peaceful people.

This interviewee spoke about Russian slavery and mistreatment of Natives. As described in chapter 2, the first Russian contact along the Pacific coast and the Kodiak area was marked by forced labor, hostage taking, slavery, and killing of local Natives. The Russians who came to the middle Kuskokwim later during the contact period came in fewer numbers with less violence. However, there still could have been instances where they took advantage of the local population and they felt coerced.

#6: They would tell me the Russians came over . . . shot a cannon, blew a tree down, demonstrating I guess the power of what they had. . . . I remember when I was young, they used to stay up there, but they used to tell me that those guns, the powder, the old muskets, used to kill the beaver, tall as the gun, the beaver they buy. . . . That's how they used to kill the beaver. I don't know how they got the powder.

Russians who stayed in the area lived off of the land just as local people did. Trapping was a main source of livelihood:

#15: They talked about the Russians, especially up in Kalskag where they were, that's not even related. I don't know that part, I just know they first came from Upper Kalskag. I'm pretty sure they were trappers, because they did, even my own dad was, when I was growing up, he was trapping. So I am pretty sure they were trappers. I don't know if they would have been gold hunters, digging for gold, just mainly trappers I am pretty sure.

#18: He used to say that my great-grandfather herded reindeer for quite a few years and my grandfather would help him herd the reindeer and do trapping at the same time. They were always having to do something.

It is believed that the Russians introduced new carpentry skills into the region. As previously discussed, those skills were an important asset for the Demientieff family who moved from the Kolmakovskiy area to Holy Cross. You can still see the distinctive corner style in some of the old churches. Carpentry skills were learned and then also used locally.

#15: The only connection they have now is through their church. And you know one thing about what my dad learned, I'm pretty sure from the Russians or you know. . . . But I know my dad he was an excellent carpenter and when you look at the log cabin he built. . . . And I didn't see no nails, you know how he build those, to connect the logs and he was just did so good with his wood building talent he had you know.

CJ: Where do you think he learned that?

#15: I don't know. He traveled. He may have learned that from his dad, you know, cause I remember, there may have been a picture I'd seen and there was a cabin, and you see all those churches that they build, the Russian Orthodox Churches how they have them, when he helped them build he learned from them and we never lived in a igloo, he built his own log cabin.

And if he had no nails, he just connected them. I know there's a way they can cut them up and let them fit like that. I'm sure he learned it from them you know. That's the only thing I can think of right now to connect to what they taught him how to do stuff.



Figure 12: Kolmakovskiy Store and Blockhouse

Photo shows the log construction used by the Russians.

Courtesy of the University of Alaska Archives.
(Oswalt, 1980b, p. 189)

One person that I interviewed told a story that the Russians were actually stopped from advancing up the river and Kolmakovskiy was where they were stopped:

#17: Well they, upriver people and the Russians they said they had a big war there where they stopped the Russians from going up and that was at Kolmakovskiy. . . . They [the Russians] wanted to go farther but the upriver Indians I guess stopped them from going up that way and I heard there was a war. . . . Ya upriver cause my, somebody said they came down and stopped them at Kolmakovskiy. And then another story I always hear on the Yukon, they call it Bishops Island I guess, where they either kill a priest or something else, them Indians.

However, Zagoskin and others say that the Russians relied upon trade networks farther up the Kuskokwim (Michael, 1967, pp. 263-274).

Pierce (1984) describes how the Russians conducted trade in the upper Kuskokwim but were warned about hostilities:

Lukin preferred to trade upstream, with the Athabascan speakers of the interior. He maintained a small outpost there also, and made annual treks to the headwaters of the Kuskokwim, into the territory of the Kolchane, and beyond. . . . The relationships with both the Kolchane and the Ingalik were of the best, and his sons, as well as himself, were at home there. In 1848, Lukin was warned by the Kolchane not to proceed beyond their territory to the Copper River as there was unrest there. Later, it was learned that the inhabitants of the Copper River valley had killed the Russian exploratory party under Serebriannikov. (p. 470)

It is possible that the interviewee is referring to the Copper River valley hostilities or the 1839 attack on the Russian *odinochka* of Ikogmiut on the Yukon and the subsequent planned attack on Lukin's *odinochka* on the Kuskokwim. The Kuskokwim attack was exposed and the attack was averted, as mentioned in chapter 2.

Conversely, there was a story about how local people were very involved with the Russians. One person was very proud of not only his own Russian ancestry but also that others provided valuable information, translation and artistry:

#18: [For] Russian influence. So for example you mentioned the fur traders, some of our families in the Yukon Kuskokwim delta have their ancestry with the fur traders, the Russian fur traders . . . the Demientieff family over in . . . Holy Cross. Saint Iakov Netsvetov, when he traveled to the Kuskokwim to Kolmakovskiy Redoubt would depend on Nikolai Demientieff for information. . . . Some people when we read in the history books of Saint Innocent for example, Saint Innocent had some translators, he had artists

who drew the pictures of the scenes that he saw. One of the artists had ancestors that live in Marshall. That was awesome, something awesome to find out about.

Here once again we see the importance of place being an essential part of identity. People name the important places in their existence and traditional stories are referenced by place. Place is a part of living history as a part of identity and roots (Basso, 1996).

Another very well-read local interviewee related information he had read in Zagoskin mixed with what he had heard from his father and the other elders of his generation. He told stories of confrontations with the Russians, introduction of diseases, traditional burials, and winter trails, just to name a few. All in all, the interviewee talked to me for over two hours, blending traditional oral stories with Zagoskin's historical record and other books he had read:

#19: They were trading, they went way far up the Yukon and they were coming up and they did not come up the mouth because that Zagoskin was writing in his diary that the coast, there were lots of coast in Kuskokwim Bay and as far as Mamterilleqmute (*Mamterilleq*=Bethel) that way up they did not let no Russians come up the river. They didn't know what they were and they said when they first saw them they didn't know what they were because they had blue eyes and they were white and they had light, light hair, maybe like, so they just war with them and they never let them come up the Kuskokwim, only in the Yukon they come up this way. And in wintertime, that's the time Zagoskin came across but he let one of the old Ikogmuits come across, this is old historical trail, the winter trail, in wintertime before snowmachines to Russian Mission. That's an old historical trail all the way down this way. And it come down this way and this way over sometimes it go across other way down. By dog team they go up. That's how that Zagoskin came and they came to up here to the upper part of the Kuskokwim by passing down there

because they wouldn't be bothered down there, killed. And they go as far as Kolmakov and they call it Kolmakov and they set up a little store up there, those Russians and they trading furs all the time before government bought Alaska. And all along it was way back in 17, 1800s. Anyway it was going on and here Kalskag was only, the older people, my dad and them, and all my uppas they were all around Crow Village. There were lot of people in Crow Village, but they move out and I'll tell you the story why they move out, but most go to Piamute, but Piamute they say long time ago was, Old Crow village, but I'll tell you later.

#19: ...like back then the Bethel people and some other Natives they were blaming on the Europeans coming, Russians first, because they come. And after that it get faster and there was lots of people but the whole village die all at once because of that they had no immunity to any kind of European disease. Pristine and they had no inoculation, no nothing. That was back in my uppa's days. And that is what I was listening to when they were telling stories. The Bethel was blaming Europeans because they know it was some kind of disease and they wanted to kill them off the first Russians. But they just burn their fort down those Mamterillermuits [Bethel people]. They were the only ones who did that, but from up here, they never war or go against the Russians or after when the missionaries were coming. The Moravians they come down to Bethel and Kwethluk and set up the same kind of there were missions helping. The government sent those kind or their own to help populate the state of Alaska.

[The mention of the attack on the Russians by the Bethel people was probably in reference to the attack at Ikogmiut.]

#19: There were not whole bunches [of Russians], just these guys. Zagoskin and those guys they were just here. There were no family Russians in this

area, only in the Southeast, they bring, try to colonize down there, but nothing in this area. They had only the men come and they were trading mostly furs, up in the Yukon and this area as far as Kolmakov and they were sending, you know what, I learned that the first Yup'ik language, what they call, like now, all the sugar, flour, cups, spoons, those are Russian words what the Yup'ik call.

#19: My nieces found an old historical site, but it was before the Russians came and they still buried them on top of the ground. And they put fencing, and they would just sit them with everything they had. And there's lot of them, here, upriver, they just buried them inside of that, so animals wouldn't bother them and they said in the future the vegetation would grow and cover them up. That's how they used to bury them.

Sergie Andreanoff is one of the well-known Russians who lived in the Sleetmute area. Bishop Amvrosii made reference to him, in his 1956 trip report from his travels to Sleetmute:

In Sleetmiut I met a Russian Orthodox man—Sergei Andreianov, 85 years old—a descendant of the Russian immigrants of those times when Russia still owned Alaska. It was pleasant to converse with him, a person who has preserved the pure Russian language, the Orthodox faith, and many historical traditions. (Amvrosii, 1956)



Figure 13: Sergie Andreanoff Dancing with Wife Marie

Sergie is at far left.¹⁹

Even today elders of the area remember Sergie:

#22: Sergie Andreanoff was married to Marie, I don't know what her maiden name was, maybe Gre-gor-y. Anyway he married her, Sergie Andreanoff married Marie. And they went up the river springtime and they had only one little daughter and she drowned springtime and there's no Andreanoffs, sons or daughters of Sergie Andreanoff. Someway or another they pick up the name. There's no Sergie Andreanoff children, zero. There's no Andreanoffs. He had no children except that one little girl who drowned up the river, Holitna break up time, just that one little, girl. I don't know her name. There's no Andreanoffs. Long ago they pick up names that they like if that person is a survivor or if they like that name, their kids can be a survivor and provider that's how they pick the names of older people.

¹⁹ Photo taken from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, Rasmuson Library, Alaska Film Archives January 4, 1956, video of Christmas in Sleetmute that features Sergie Andreanoff and his wife Marie performing a Yup'ik dance along with Santa Claus. It also features a school puppet show, and the Selaviq star being spun. It is entitled "Christmas celebration in Sleetmute, a village in Southwest Alaska," AAF-156, McConkey Collection, 1955-1957, Color/Silent, 02:21 TT.

#23: They used to say, my dad used to tell us about old Sergie Andreanoff, he used to say he's a part of, I don't know if we ever ask him, part of his parents, I heard they were always part of Russia when Russia used to stay around here before they move. That old man he's just like halfbreeds. Wouldn't talk Native. He talk Native too. He dance by himself by out there when there music going. He used to be holding on to something...they always tell us he's Russian, he look like white man but he talk Yup'ik, sing like Russians, big voice, Russian Orthodox song.

Other Russians were also remembered by name. Their family names are still prevalent in the middle Kuskokwim, but are thought of as Native:

CJ: So there's lots of Russian families around here that have Russian in their background you think?

#23: Well I guess so that's all I know, Pete Abruska and his sister I guess. They say Pete Abruska was, okay that's from their dad, that old Abruska they call him. Old Chief in Napaimute. Alice and Pete Abruska's dad . . . and that old man, Pete Abruska's dad was same thing. He had a tune [when singing] like him [like Sergie Andreanoff]. Guess his dad Russian, or parents...And there was one guy in Napaskiak he used to serve, he used to serve, Russian Orthodox, sing choirs. I guess, I don't know.

#19: He used to have red hair, that old Valka they thought he might be Russian too. But he was down at Lower and Elena's mom and Crim Evan's mom and those mothers. The brother was that guy's son, Andrew Valka, Valka and he married those Smiths, they were Russian too, part Russian from Russian Mission. Mary Valka. You used to know John Smith, Coffee.

Yet again, place is an important part of the stories told. The narratives are tied to specific places, especially when talking about their ancestors who came from a specific place and then traveled to other parts of Alaska. Places include villages, Russian settlements, and also mountains and river systems. Some families could trace their Russian ancestors to a specific place, but most did not know how or why they came into the country. There were also contrasts made between themselves as indigenous people and the Russians, with mentions of possible slavery, and how they used to be peaceful in the past. Others brought up the Russian introduction of diseases and other conflicts. These stories are valuable family narratives. Where there may have been some question as to the historical accuracy, I have attempted to provide background information.

The daughter of a man who claimed to have lived in Siberia told another very interesting family history. She said he longed to go back to Siberia and although he was considered to be Alaska Native, he was very “different” from others around him. She did not know for sure but thought he could indeed have come from Siberia. Others knew of Russian ancestors of some of the families of the area, who now are considered Native. Those Russian ancestors were remembered by name as Old Man Abruska or Old Man Valka, the name then becoming the last name of the family. The most current memories were of Sergie Andreanoff, a Russian who died in the 1960s and, according to one elder, had adopted children who took on the name.

All agreed that their Russian ancestors who stayed in the area lived off of the land just as local people did, but there was also the recognition of specific skills such as carpentry that the Russians brought in. There was also pride in the fact that local people were very involved with the Russians providing valuable information, translation, and artistry.

Some of the interview data is very enlightening as far as the ideas of human relations and how outsiders are viewed. Generally, after the era of initial contact and tribal conflicts, when outsiders came into an area or village Native people were helpful, and while not assuming they were all good, many indigenous people had

protocol for making sure people felt welcomed and were helped. Their way of showing respect was part of their axiology framework.

Influence of the Cold War on Russian Identity

It never occurred to me that the Cold War and Russian-United States hostilities could have an effect on how people expressed or did not express their Russian identity. But this issue came up a couple of times in the interviews. Even for people of the middle Kuskokwim, international politics and nationalism can affect how people choose to identify themselves. National identity is another layer to the puzzle of individual identity. National identity becomes more important as people unite to oppose external threats to the nation. As those perceived threats lessen, so does the need to rally around national identity.

#16: I don't know if, it seems like, because of the Cold War whatever and all that, it seems like a lot of the information, our history was kept away from, because of the tension between the two countries and everything like that. . . . It's so funny how my dad in this one old newspaper article talked about he was part Native and part Communist, that kind of thing to be able to realize that, to see.

#18: I'm beginning to see that . . . it [having Russian blood] is being brought out in the open more and more because when America and Russia were having the Cold War, it was a very tense situation, especially for those who had Russian blood. They kind wanted to keep it hidden. [laughs] My wife used to say, she's part a German, then when the Cold War was over the next thing she said was you know I'm part Russian, so whoa you know to figure out which way her Russian blood, heritage went. It started at the D . . . family.

This section, although brief, brings up new concerns of allegiance to Russian identity being affected by international relations and threats to national security.

One of the interviews even equated Russian identity with being a communist, and in the era of the Cold War and the 1950s McCarthy hearings, Russian ancestry was probably of ominous concern, resulting in hiding this heritage. This could also help explain why some families did not tell their children about their Russian ancestry.

Distinction Between Russian and White/Caucasian Ancestry

As stated previously, the Yugtun word for white person, *kass'aq*, comes directly from the Russian *kaza,k* which became cossack in English. *Kass'alugpiaq* is the term used for Russian and by extension, a member of the Russian Orthodox Church. Its literal translation is “original white person” (Jacobson, 1984, p. 190).

It is interesting to note that there is a word in Yugtun that can be used in the case of a person of mixed ancestry. Roughly translated the Yugtun word *avguuq* refers to half-breed. Another term in Yugtun besides *avguuq* is *-rrluguq* ending syllable which means partial or slightly something. (T. John, personal communication, October 2013).

Father Michael Oleksa also points out that Russians and Caucasians are differentiated in Alaska Native languages and this shows that they were perceived as different from each other:

Russian, in Yup'ik “the original or authentic white people” was an empire, not just a nationality. So we call “Russians” in our history books any citizen of the Russian empire, regardless of “race” or ethnicity. Estimates range from 20-30% of the “Russians” who came to Alaska were Natives of Kamchatka, “Kamchadal” and not ethnically Slavs at all and probably another third were frontiersmen of mixed ancestry. Russian and other Caucasians are differentiated in Alaska Native languages so they must have been perceived and categorized as different from each other. (M. J. Oleksa, personal communication, October 2013)

Some of those I interviewed pointed out that the Russians, as Cossacks, were thought of as white, and the fact that they married into the local population did not change that perception:

#19: I think those first guys they were Cossack tribe, not Cossack from Russia. They were telling Natives they were Cossacks so it stick with them, so all of the Yup'iks, they were white, because of that all of the Yup'iks call them *kass'aqs*, because of the Cossacks. The Russians said they were Cossacks and then Yup'iks they call them, from then on they call them *kass'aqs* because of Cossacks.

#13a: I believe my Russian ancestors were thought of as white and to the best of my knowledge the fact that they married into the local culture did not affect how people thought of them.

One person did not know how their ancestors were perceived but made a comparison to today's communities.

#7: I don't know if our [Russian] ancestors were thought of as a "white Caucasian" back then. I know that now after awhile people in the community think of the [non-Native] spouses as one of them.

In some of my interviews, Russians were described as "like white people." However, often, as seen in the above section, a caveat was added that they could talk Yup'ik (Yugtun), implying a difference from other white people. The following quotes were referenced above, but are included here in part also.

23: Sergie Andreanoff. . . . That old man he's just like halfbreeds. Wouldn't talk Native. He talk Native too. . . . I know that Old Man Sergie, they always tell us he's Russian, he look like white man but he talk Yup'ik, sing like Russians, big voice, Russian Orthodox song.

#23: That old man . . . that old man Abruska. He call him chief, whatever he was. . . . He's part of like white people [laughs] but he could talk.

#18: My dad used to tell us that his grandfather was a full-blooded Russian, was completely Caucasian. But he was able to speak Yup'ik, so that was a big difference.

#5: They had Russian blood in them. Russian blood they would tell me it was like white people's blood, half and half. My dad's blood was half and half. His mama's blood and his dad's blood. Cause they were full Russians, both of them.

#23: I see some [Russians] in Anchorage. They are really kind when they ask us questions because we are all relations. I see them in Anchorage. And one guy was preaching and they said they were in Alaska before the move, before they were so young.

Other people interviewed did not know how their ancestors were perceived and wondered why this information had not been shared.

#16: I was not informed by my parents [regarding how people thought of my ancestors.] It seems to me that some family information about our ancestors were not passed down. I am quite surprised that most of my family members don't discuss this at all and the only real history I know from both sides of my parents is only up to my parents, parents; which is my grandparents. Your question makes me wonder if there could be reasons for this because of our Russian roots?

Various scholars have written that the Russians were distinguished from other white men. Black states that:

In general Russians are distinguished conceptually and linguistically from other "white men." I was told once that Russians were not white, and several researchers have noted that the Russians, and most particularly the Orthodox Church, are "identified with the other way of life . . . consistently

connected with the past when, it is felt, times were better.” (Black, 1992, pp. 101-102)

In short, Orthodoxy and the Native worldview were in some aspects compatible. The new faith, like the old one, served as primary identity marker. In some cases it helped forge a new common identity among the peoples who before contact were enemies. It continues to serve so today. (Black, 1992, p. 105)

Hosley (1966), in his work with the upper Kuskokwim Kolchan Athabascans, found that the Orthodox Church had come to be identified with the older way of life: Apparently related [to Orthodoxy being identified with the older way of life] is a tendency to differentiate between the “Russians,” the people with whom the Kolchan first had extensive contact, and the “White Men,” those Anglo-Europeans who subsequently entered the area. The Russians and the church are consistently connected with the past when, it is felt, times were better. (p. 81-82)

Even today there is some distinction made between Caucasian people who are in the village for a short time versus those who make it their home. I personally have also experienced terminology used for a Caucasian person who is still white but is recognized to respect local traditions and participate in local activities. An elder who is long deceased liked to use the term “Guskimo” when referring to myself and another person. I have also been referred to as not really a *kass’aq*. Both I consider much-appreciated compliments. I think a lot of it has to do with longevity in the area, living and working with local people, truly enjoying village life, showing respect, and also the willingness to participate in subsistence activities, cook local foods, attend community events, visit homes, host Selaviq, and the fact that I have tried to raise my daughter to appreciate her Yup’ik and Athabascan roots.

Scholars feel that there was a definite distinction between Russians and other European Caucasians who came into the area. Oleksa (personal communication, 2013) points out that Alaska Native languages differentiate between Russians and other Caucasians; Black (1992) says she was told that Russians were not labeled as white and were identified with another way of life; and Hosley (1966) states that Russians at first contact were differentiated from Anglo-Saxons who came later.

The people I talked with did not necessarily make that distinction. Some stated that they did not know how their ancestors were perceived. Most said they considered the Russians as *kass'aqs* (white people). *Kass'alugpiaq*, the term used for Russian, is literally translated as "original white person." However, many people did say that Russians who stayed in the area spoke the Native language and that made "a difference."

Russians who lived in the area for a long time spoke Yugtun, were more accepted, and when they married into indigenous families had kinship ties, which also broadened their acceptance. Russians who could speak Yugtun integrated themselves in the community, lived the indigenous lifestyle, and became part of community in ways that a non-Yugtun speaking outsider might not have. Thus family lineage and kinship, like the other "bubbles" of my identity framework presented in chapter 7, are not bounded and static, providing another way at looking at indigenous ontology, axiology, and epistemology. (Ontology, axiology, and epistemology are discussed more fully in chapters 2 and 3.)

Advantages or Disadvantages for Russian Ancestors

Regarding Russian ancestry, it can be insightful to ask if there is a legacy of impact. Where there was intermarriage, were there white father opportunities, or opportunities because of exposure to Russian culture? Is there a legacy to a son or

grandson who received an economic boost or educational opportunities, from a Russian father or grandfather?

Clearly under Russian rule, the Creole offspring of a Russian father and Native mother had opportunities above those afforded to the Native population. As discussed earlier, the special Creole status disappeared during the American Era. The question remains if people feel their Russian ancestors had advantages because of their mixed ancestry.

Those that I interviewed don't think their ancestors necessarily had an advantage from being Russian; however, they pointed out that often they were leaders in the Orthodox Church. So in that important role, they helped shape the religious beliefs, tradition, and role of the church in the community. This is significant, as each small village church has grown up with their own specific ways of doing things, as discussed above in regard to celebrations such as Selaviiq.

#11: I believe they [both Russian and part Russian] had an advantage as far as having a say in the church council because they were more familiar with the church procedures. If I remember reading correctly in the journal of Iakov Netsvetov, they had an advantage because they were a part of the church and worked as a group. But when it came to hunting and traveling, they relied on the local Natives because of their familiarity with the surroundings and hunting skills.

#13a: I do not think my Russian ancestors had an advantage or opportunities because they were Russian. Their religion and beliefs were different than the local culture and they had positions of leadership in the village and church.

Another person interviewed also wasn't sure of the advantages or disadvantages with Russian ancestry but pointed out that there were definite expectations of those who were Orthodox.

#7: I don't know if descendants of white church leaders had advantages.

However, my dad and his dad were both church leaders so that may have been some advantages. You think of other names of church leaders like Nickoli and Avakumoff, they were church leaders. I know many friends who were married to non-Orthodox partners who had to act a special way. People who are married to church members in the Orthodox faith are told to act a certain way. I overheard a community member seriously tell a woman whose husband was studying to be a priest that she had to change her ways. She was told not to curse, play cards, and other things. So you never know.

Having Russian ancestry was often respected, but at other times led to discrimination:

12a: I always heard the Russians referred to as *kass'aqs*. I do know that the Orthodox priests were highly respected by the people who were Russian ordained. The unfortunate children of Russians were often picked on because of their light complexion, but don't know what the advantage would be for them being part Russian.

Father Michael Oleksa reminds us of the special status of the Creoles, the advantages they had through language and culture, and the high status they had: Certainly those who were of mixed parentage had an advantage over those with one, usually because they were conversant if not fluent in two languages. This made them the natural liaisons and in some cases managers or middle-management staff in many parts of the territory. "Creoles" also were educated at company expense, as was decreed by the second charter (1818-1838) and renewed in the third and last charter as well. The Government held the company responsible for the education and employment of the children born to company employees and their Alaska Native wives, and this meant that by 1840 or 50, "Natives" were running much of the commercial operations and even sailing the supply ships around

the north Pacific. On the contrary, in the USA, people of mixed racial background were stigmatized. While no Creoles rose to the rank of governor, at least one became a major general in the Russian Army—something impossible in the USA at the same time. (M. J. Oleksa, personal communication, October 2013)

Oswalt (1990) includes an interesting discussion about the impact of some of the Russian workers who stayed in the Kuskokwim region after the sale of Alaska. Ivan Lukin, Nikolai Dementiev, and Sergie Andreanoff continued trading activities at Kolmakovskiy and Vinasale along with newcomers George Separe and Edward Lind. He goes on to state:

The descendants of these men had relatively little impact on affairs along the river during the American period. The family line of Lukin died out locally, while the Dementiev and Separe families relocated along the Yukon. The descendants of Sergie Andreanoff continue to live in Sleetmute area and carry on the family name but not the trading activities. (p. 78)

Those interviewed did not feel that there was any legacy of impact associated with having a Russian ancestor. Perhaps this is also an indication that their Russian ancestors had integrated themselves well into their family kinship system and the local culture. The early economic and linguistic advantages of those with Russian ancestry, especially as leaders in the trading activities of the region, faded as later generations blended in with local populations. However, those of Russian ancestry continued to be leaders in their local Orthodox Church, and as seen in previous discussions it is still a source of pride for their descendants. As church leaders they helped shape the religious beliefs, tradition, and role of the church in the community, and it is noteworthy that each small village church has grown up with its own specific ways of doing things.

The Orthodox Church continues to influence community dynamics even into more modern times. When asked if the moral teachings of the church affected what was done on the community level, one person responded:

#11: I know in Russian Mission it did. The city would plan events around the church's schedule, mainly because the main population was Russian Orthodox. Like for instance, the winter carnival was and is still held before the Russian Orthodox Easter lent. While growing up, we rarely saw Saturday night activities because of the Saturday evening church services. I'm not sure if it is still that way now. . . . I feel the church affected what was done because most everyone shared the same beliefs and upbringing.

However, having Russian ancestry was not always recognized as a positive attribute, with one interviewee referring to the "unfortunate children of Russians," facing discrimination. The discrimination faced by "half-breeds" was also mentioned in chapter 2 in the case of Effie Kokrine's family (Freiburger, 2013, pp. 43, 55-56). Even the use of the term half-breed reflects colonization.

Lastly, perhaps one of the most influential major events impacting people's view of who they are was the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and the use of the Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood. This is discussed in the following section.

Effect of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) and Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB or CIB) on How People Identify Themselves

Chapter 4 includes history on the formation of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and the Certificate of Indian Blood (CIB). People interviewed brought up blood quantum as a decisive factor in how they think about their identity.

When looking at the impact of blood quantum and ANCSA enrollment it is important to look beyond the financial aspects of being a member of a village or

Native corporation. Land was also transferred to village and regional corporations. Place is a very strong component of indigenous identity and today being a part of that land ownership, as a corporation member, adds to that sense of place.

Traditionally, the Yup'ik and Athabascan peoples of the middle Kuskokwim recognized rights to use resources and areas but did not own the land. Land ownership and land transfer are western concepts.

Early cases in particular held that non-Natives could not acquire land from Indian people without the consent of the federal government. In other words, Alaska Native people had an aboriginal claim to land that only the U.S. government could settle. The first such case, *United States v. Berrigan* (1905) was heard by Judge James Wickersham, and involved a dispute over land near Delta Junction. ("Federal Indian Law for Alaska Tribes," 2011)

Just as civilized versus uncivilized tribal membership had an impact in the John Mynook case, Judge Wickersham ruled that prospectors in the Tanana Valley could not buy land from the Indians because they were considered uncivilized tribes.

We must also recognize the various levels of identity from individual, family, village, regional, and beyond. Clearly ANCSA added to the regional and tribal dimension. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was the beginning of a new surge in Native pride. As an example, Pullar (2013) writes about the revival of Sugpiaq culture, language, and artwork that began during this time.

The sovereignty movement and fights for subsistence rights have also added to the spotlight on being Native. People are proud of their tribal identification. I believe "Nativity" also becomes a means of linkage back to home villages for those Alaska Natives who have moved to urban areas.

Some of the quotes I have included in this section were included in the discussions above. Here I focused on the parts that refer to the ANCSA or CIB. In

these interviews it is clear that the emphasis on blood quantum overshadows Russian or other European heritage and is used as the standard for official identity.

As discussed in chapter 4, the percentage of “Native blood” no longer has bearing on actual services received, but the perceived importance of this designation significantly impacts how people think of themselves today:

#1c: Well that’s how I got interested [in our Russian grandparents] because of my children and their need to know.

CJ: And were you happy later when you found out?

#1c: Yes, and we’re all Alaskan Natives.

#1a: That’s what I put, Alaskan Native and when they want percentage you put four-fourths.

#1c: And they say four-fourths what? And I say whatever you want to put. [laughs] And they put Yup’ik and I say I’m not Yup’ik [laughs] we leave it at that.

Another person interviewed stated that her mother stressed that she should only say she was a real Eskimo:

CJ: So how did you feel about being part Russian, were you proud of it?

#3: I don’t know cause I never, I don’t have no feeling about it. But my mom say I am real Eskimo. When they ask you, say you are real Eskimo, not Russian. I don’t know what part I am but my grandpa was part Russian.

So although people would discuss with me their Russian or other European identity, they said they always put down four-fourths Native blood:

#16: We in Alaska we always think about how Native we are, you know the blood, CIB and stuff like that but we don’t know how much Russian we are you know because you never have to think about how much Russian we have.

CJ: And do you think that's probably due to the services that are available, based on Native blood?

#16: Ya for us as beneficiaries, we have to show how Native we are or how much Native blood we have or whatever.

CJ: So do you think of yourself as Yup'ik, Russian, Indian, mixture?

#20: Indian mix, out Yukon. I am four-fourths of Athabascan Indian from out of Yukon.

CJ: You think of yourself as four-fourths Athabascan. And they still use that for CIBs right? So have you passed down, I mean when you are talking to your kids to you mention the Russian and the Yup'ik and the Indian and all that together?

#20: Im hmm.

CJ: And you remember ANCSA when people had to enroll. I've had people say well I know I have this mix, but I still put down four-fourths you know.

#15: Ya.

CJ: Do you think that is the case most of the time?

#15: Im hmm.

Father Michael Oleksa nicely summarized the blood quantum issue: There's a whole lot of mix out there than people realize and on the other hand people still take justifiable pride in their tribal identity. Why would they want in a sense to dilute that, especially when they cannot document any of it. And as far as anyone else is concerned, I'm 100% full blooded, Yup'ik but I know that wasn't even true of my father-in-law. (M. J. Oleksa, personal communication, April 2013)

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act had a wide range of economic and social effects on the indigenous peoples of Alaska. Land status and sense of place was affected with a new regional identity coming to the forefront. ANCSA added to the regional and tribal dimension and it also set up a measure of identity in a hierarchal system created and imposed from outside, based on blood quantum. Official recognition as Alaska Native was determined less by culture and more by blood quantum, with pressure to document that Native blood. In one case, an interviewee who is now an elder herself, was instructed by her mother: "When they ask you, say you are real Eskimo, not Russian."

For some the ANCSA was the beginning of a new surge in Native pride. Being able to "show how Native we are" is the overriding aspect of current identity in the middle Kuskokwim. Blood quantum is still viewed as the yardstick for "Nateness." However, it is ironic that even with Russian or other European ancestry people still put down "four-fourths." People are not calculating blood quantum as much as they are choosing blood quantum, at least in instances where the non-Native heritage is several generations past. As the standard for official Native identity, the emphasis on blood quantum and being a "beneficiary" overshadows Russian or other European heritage.

People want to know their ancestors and their mixed identity but also realize that being four-fourths Alaska Native gives one a higher Native status, and often the Caucasian ancestor is several generations past. Perhaps this notion of full blood being superior comes from as early as the beginning of the American era, where people of "mixed" blood faced discrimination and "half-breed" was a derogatory term. This is more fully discussed in chapter 2.

As referenced above, Yugtun does have words that can be used in the case of a person of mixed ancestry, being part or slightly something. Today as children are born, parents continue to apply for the Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood, which lists each parent and their percentage of Native blood, based on their own CIBs.

Summary

Chapter 6 continues the interview analysis that was started in chapter 5. Once again, my analytic process for examining the transcribed interviews involves three steps:

1. Thematic identification: identify recurring themes in the interviews
2. Focus on resonant narratives around identity using people's own words
3. Theoretical framework for analysis: examine the actual narratives to determine a model for what identity means in the middle Kuskokwim

This chapter summarizes key portions of my interviews, centering on the modern-day effects of Russian identity. Interviewees' verbatim accounts focused on shared topics around which common themes were identified as being important components of this identity:

- Knowledge of Russian foods and words that have become part of the Native culture
- Stories about Russians
- Influence of the Cold War on Russian identity
- Distinction between Russian and White/Caucasian ancestry
- Advantages or disadvantages for Russian ancestors
- Effect of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood on how people identify themselves

My literature review once again serves as the foundation for the examination of identity in the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska. In chapter 6, an important aspect of identity is the person's idea and expression of their individuality as well as group affiliations. Barth (1969) reminds us that only the aspects of culture, which the individuals themselves regard as significant help define the ethnic group (pp. 10-15).

Once again, knowledge of ancestry is necessary to ethnic identity. Sprott (1994) talks about the complexity in dealing with individuals who have more than

one heritage, as they may choose to identify with one, none or a combination of heritages. Sprott also points out that mixed blood is sometimes used to describe a mixed heritage, and that blood quantum has special meaning for indigenous Americans (p. 312). This is certainly the case in Alaska.

As discussed in chapter 5, traditional values focusing around practicing Native traditions, knowledge of family tree, respect for land and nature, honoring ancestors, and spirituality are key elements of identity, as well as Kawagley's (1995) emphasis on balance and the inter-relationship between the natural, spiritual, and human realms. In this chapter, historical, political, and legislative influences impact personal and group identity. However, place, ethnicity, traditions, ancestral roots, and religion still form the basis of indigenous identity.

In chapter 5, I discussed the elements of the several Western theoretical approaches that I found to be partially useful in looking at cultural change and identity, including syncretism, transculturation, cultural resiliency, and constructivist grounded theory. Those same approaches are applicable to the interview narratives from chapter 6.

I used the aspect of constructivist grounded theory emphasizing the relationship between the researcher and the participant with value being placed on the participant and reciprocal interaction between the researcher and the research participants.

As discussed in chapters 1 and 2, it is important for us to remember that the borrowing and sharing of cultural beliefs and practices was part of indigenous peoples' interactions prior to Russian contact. This adaptation and blending continued as indigenous cultures were faced with 20th century rapid changes in regional economies and lifestyle. This syncretism resulted in transculturation, reflected in continuous two-way borrowing and learning between cultures. Yup'ik and Athabascan values and culture did not just disappear but were adapted and merged into a modern cultural hybrid.

Perhaps the most applicable Western theoretical approach to help explain the modern cultural adaptation and survival of indigenous culture and values is cultural resilience. When indigenous peoples are confronted by an outside incursion that threatens their way of life and very existence, cultural resilience helps explain how individuals and societies have endured and responded to changing conditions. Change is a part of cultural adaptation and can also be the successful solution to a problem. At the beginning of the 20th century the Treaty of Cession was still used to evaluate indigenous rights. Even after Alaska Natives and others were given the right to vote, many still faced discrimination, including those of mixed blood. With the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, identity was once again brought to the forefront, with a renewed focus on documenting as much Native blood as possible. As stated above, the notion of “blood quantum” is a Western concept to measure identity, which has been imposed on indigenous peoples to determine who qualifies for various rights and services. Although this measurement of identity disregards indigenous axiology, ontology, and epistemology, it has had a strong impact on how Alaska Native people see themselves. Thus, people’s concept of identity can change, dependent not only on family ancestry but also outside influences. A resilient culture can maintain and develop cultural identity, knowledge and practices despite challenges and difficulties. Thus cultural resiliency takes the form of positive adaptation despite adversity.

With the use of these Western approaches, it is important to once again keep in mind that this methodology is limited when considering indigenous ontology and epistemology, which is framed by a strong indigenous axiology. Factors such as the balance between the natural, spiritual, and human realms, interpersonal relationships, and place are at the core of indigenous identity. In looking at indigenous identity, I have found that axiology (value system) frames ontology (behavior) and epistemology (beliefs). This will be more thoroughly discussed in the next chapter.

In my concluding chapter 7, I use people’s own words to focus on resonant

narratives around identity and present a theoretical framework as a model for what identity means in the middle Kuskokwim River region of Alaska, taking into account various influences on Russian and indigenous identity.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Introduction

The objective of my research is to document the role that Russian heritage has played in the individual and group identity of Native people in the middle Kuskokwim River region of Alaska. The changes and adaptations that occurred in this area during the Russian era, 1790-1867; the changes that occurred with the sale of Alaska; and the continued changes up to the present time, all impact the heritage and tradition of today.

Documentation of the Russian impact, the resulting cultural changes, and the influences still seen today through people's cultural identity adds to the body of knowledge on the middle Kuskokwim region. Information on this cultural blending adds to the understanding of the cultural roots that support and sustain past and current life in the middle Kuskokwim.

My study contributes to the body of knowledge on the middle Kuskokwim region both from a historical standpoint and current indigenous views on identity. K-12 teachers and those in higher education can use my summary of historical events for discussions on regional history with references for further study. The interview narratives also provide a frank look at the complicated aspects of indigenous identity in today's world as seen by those who are most affected by changing conditions, bringing out aspects of identity not found in other studies, such as the historical roots of present-day influences of Russian heritage on Native culture. And my research contributes to Alaska Native communities by providing insight into the complexities of indigenous identity through people's own words, which is important because it illustrates the indigenous rootedness of worldview and identity that is still a part of today's modern society.

The study asks the following research questions: What impact did Russian explorers, traders, and Orthodox clergy have on the middle Kuskokwim River region of Alaska? How has Russian influence changed over time, and how has this Russian heritage impacted present-day cultural identity in the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska? Included is the broader discussion of how people in the region define their identity and what aspects of that identity are most important to them.

Thus my examination of the influence of Russian heritage has led to a broader discussion of indigenous identity. Russian identity is only one part of a much larger picture of Indigenous identity; it is one component that has influenced the indigenous identity through time. Like a stew, Russian influences are but one ingredient in the current indigenous identity.

Looking at interview data, it is imperative to use an indigenous research paradigm that takes into account people's ontology (the nature of being, existence, behavioral aspects), epistemology (knowledge, beliefs), and axiology (values), keeping relationships in balance as suggested in Kawagley's tetrahedral framework centering on the balance between the natural, human, and spiritual realms. Values, beliefs, and behavior are the umbrella that encompasses how people operate and are the basis for common understanding. It is how people view who they are and how they incorporate aspects of past and present that shape who they are. For indigenous identity, values are at the core, including respect for elders and others, knowledge of family tree, respect for land and nature, practice of Native traditions, honoring ancestors, humility, spirituality, and importance of place. These are some of the values articulated during the interviews. Place, ethnicity, traditions, ancestral roots, and religion form the basis of indigenous identity, and as we have seen to varying degrees, Russian heritage has influenced importance of place, ancestral roots, and most directly religious beliefs and practice.

Resonant Narratives

In chapters 5 and 6 I've included narratives from my interview data, divided into specific themes. Although I presented the themes separately, they overlap, connect, and intersect. From the interview themes, resonant narratives can be identified, illustrating the Russian influence in the region and helping to formulate a theoretical framework for understanding Russian influences on identity. The following themes resonate throughout the interviews.

“It didn’t bother me”; “I am proud of it”

When talking about their Russian ancestry, many people stated that it didn’t bother them, or they had no feeling about it:

#7: It didn’t bother me at all.

#11: It never really bothered me. . . . I never heard of it bothering anyone.

#12a: I don’t know. It doesn’t bother me. It’s just who I am I guess. Can’t help it if I have the ancestry of Russian blood in me.

#3: I don’t know cause I never, I don’t have no feeling about it.

Others said they were proud of their Russian ancestry:

#6: I was (proud of it).

#13a: I feel good and proud of it.

#13b: I am very proud.

Pride in both their Russian and Native ancestry was also mentioned because it represented who they were and it was a link to their ancestors and connection to current relatives. In this instance identity is framed from an indigenous epistemology with the value being placed on remembering one’s ancestors and the ways they are part of you.

#2: I feel okay because you know, I felt that I had my dad’s ancestors in me I guess. . . . Yes. Proud of being Russian and Yup’ik.

#19: Ya I am [proud]. Pretty good because, I am proud for all of them [heritages], come in one.

#18: Ya, ya being a Russian and being a Native at the same time, it's double double . . .

CJ: Double pride?

#18: Ya which I'm supposed to stay away from.

The value of humility is evident in the above discussions. Pride is mentioned as something to "stay away from" by the last interviewee. The seemingly conflicting statements between Russian ancestry "not bothering anyone" versus being "proud" to be Russian, I believe for some is also a case of expressing humility. The statement "it doesn't bother me" may be a positive, rather than negative view of ancestry. In the instances where I asked the follow-up question, "Are you proud to be Russian?" to those who said it didn't bother them, I always received a yes answer.

For those who stated, "It doesn't bother me. It's just who I am I guess. Can't help it if I have the ancestry of Russian blood in me," having Russian heritage is neither negative nor positive, but rather just an expression of a fact they have no control over.

"Mixed up person"

The idea of mixed heritage came out strongly in the interviews, both a mixture of indigenous heritage, primarily Yup'ik and Athabascan, but also Russian and other European mix.

#8: Only after we started doing all this research I thought Wow. I just always considered myself totally Athabascan and nothing else.

CJ: So you've got Russian, Yup'ik, Athabascan of course and Finnish and German?

#8: Ya, mixed up person.

#1a: Til we came down here [Kalskag] we were Ingaliks, got some Indian in us.

#19: I think we are some Russian blood both in my grandmas mostly. Also Indian on my dad's side and maybe Russian. My mom was half Russian and Malimiut Northern Eskimo.

#15: You know when you look at like Kalskag people, and right from there, that's the point from there, downriver, below Lower Kalskag, they're Eskimo people, but us from up here . . . people are mixed from Athabascan and Eskimo mixed.

While ancestral roots are an important topic and some of how people see themselves, the idea of formally tracking kinship and genealogy is an outside concept that was not necessarily part of indigenous vocabulary or concept prior to contact. This has added to the complexity of modern views of identity. Knowing one's ancestors is one thing, but studying and charting out relatives is not the way people think about roots.

There was also religious mixture expressed within families between Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Spirituality is a key component of indigenous identity. Today many families are blended both religiously and ethnically.

CJ: Was your family Russian Orthodox?

#17: Just my mom. My dad was Catholic.

#15: My dad actually his parents were Russian Orthodox and when he married my mom, she's Catholic, and he switched to Catholic and his uncles, or his cousins, they are all Russian Orthodox and but us we're all Catholic.

#20: My dad is Catholic and my mom is Orthodox.

#7: My dad [was Orthodox] married my mom, she was a Catholic, so not everybody in my family is Russian Orthodox, just myself and my brother.

Influence of Orthodoxy; “Do it their way”; Non Conflicting Values

One of the most resonant narratives expressed in the interviews was the discussion of the existence of the Russian Orthodox religion as the most tangible aspect of Russian heritage in today’s modern villages. These Orthodox resonant narratives and other reminders of Russian culture were pointed out earlier, but are repeated here as a summary of Russian influence.

Father Michael Oleksa described the importance of local church traditions: “They can do it their way, preserve some of their local customs. And that’s perfectly okay, that’s the only way the church has survived with this indigenous, this rootedness” (M. J. Oleksa, personal communication, April 2013).

During the interviews people brought up the discussion of Russian song and church books and the importance of their maintenance. The use of Russian language in the services and songs was important to maintain, even if the precise translation was not known. In this instance the use of Russian has become part of the oral tradition, as songs and prayers are learned orally and if written down, are written with English syllables to aid in the pronunciation. The use of the Russian language in services, and the existence of Russian prayer and songbooks are mentioned when talking about Russian heritage. This was a material link to their Russian past.

The continuation of Selaviq, Orthodox Christmas, has also preserved the old songs and prayers. As previously mentioned, Fienup-Riordan (1990) calls Selaviq “a Yup’ik transformation of a Russian Orthodox tradition” (p. 94) and both Oleksa (1992) and Fienup-Riordan (1990) make note of the syncretism of traditional celebrations and beliefs, merging with this Orthodox Christmas celebration that come together in Selaviq, including memorial feasting, gift giving, visiting between villages, and feeding deceased relatives. It is also interesting to note that even today some of the Selaviq carols are sung in Russian. People do not know the language, but sing it phonetically and resist any suggestions to change it. Each Orthodox village also has their own unique ways of doing services, which has preserved the church’s “indigenous rootedness” specific to place.

There is also a great sense of pride in the churches themselves with their distinctive crosses, domes, and the original icons that were once found in the first village church. People interviewed always mentioned if they had a family member who was involved in building the local Orthodox church. Families always talked about their proud heritage of a father, grandfather, or other relative who built the first Orthodox village church with no outside assistance or funding. The construction was done voluntarily with people contributing their own time and money. This is another indication of the pride and dedication people have to their Russian ancestry.

Adults also remember very strict Sunday services and observances in the home, complete with special Sunday dress. The continuation of giving Orthodox names is still a part of baptism, as is the giving of Native names.

Other tangible aspects of Russian ancestry include the many Russian words that have been readily accepted into Yup'ik and other Alaska indigenous languages where no indigenous word existed. There are also local foods that come from Russian tradition but that are now considered Native food. The first thing anyone thinks about is Russian pie, which is a savory pie made with fish, rice, and vegetables, usually served at special occasions.

Other Russian customs such as women covering their heads at church or wearing long dresses continue to be followed, especially by Native elders of the Orthodox faith. It is also believed that the Russians introduced new carpentry skills into the region. As previously discussed, those skills were an important asset for the Demientieff family who moved from the Kolmakovskiy area to Holy Cross. You can still see the distinctive corner style in some of the old churches.

A very important aspect of the success of the Russian and indigenous blending was that Native values did not conflict with Orthodox beliefs. Traditional values focusing around practicing Native traditions, knowledge of family tree, respect for land and nature, importance of place, honoring ancestors, and spirituality are key elements of identity.

#18: The Russian priests were told...when they are traveling, they are told that they are guests to the communities and not to be, not to try to overrun them or overrule them in any way. Be as guests of the people, not to force them to turn away from their own language or their own culture.

All agreed that their Russian ancestors who stayed in the area lived off of the land just as local people did. There was also pride in the fact that local people were very involved with the Russians, providing valuable information and translation.

As previously stated, scholars feel that there was a definite distinction between Russians and other European Caucasians who came into the area. Oleksa (personal communication, 2013) points out that Alaska Native languages differentiate between Russians and other Caucasians; Black (1992) says she was told that Russians were not labeled as white and were identified with another way of life; and Hosley (1966) states that Russians at first contact were differentiated from Anglo-Saxons who came later.

The people I talked with did not necessarily make that distinction. Some stated that they did not know how their ancestors were perceived. Most said they considered the Russians as *kass'aqs* (white people). However, many people did say that Russians who stayed in the area spoke the Native language and that "made a difference."

Those that I interviewed don't think their ancestors necessarily had an advantage by being Russian, however, they pointed out that often they were leaders in the Orthodox Church. So in that important role, they helped shape the religious beliefs, tradition, and role of the church in the community.

Importance of Place

Perhaps nothing was mentioned more in the discussion of identity than the places relatives came from. As previously discussed, the question "Who are you?" "*Kit'usit?*" is used as a way of making a connection, and the discussion always

includes not only the names of your relatives but where they come from. The knowledge of place is important to help establish roots. Throughout the interviews people referred to specific villages, upriver versus downriver people, Yup'ik versus Athabascan, Yup'ik versus Yupiaq, and Yukon versus Kuskokwim.

#14: My dad always talked about Siberia. He would talk about that someday he would like to go back to Siberia.

#1b: I know they [my parents] come from Yukon somewhere.

#16: My parents are from upriver, from Sleetmute, Crooked. . . . You know *qagkumiut*—upriver people, *unugkumiut*—down river people.

#12c: My mom, they migrated. They went from Stony River to all the way to my hometown, Nondalton is.

#8: My great-great-grandfather came from Russia. He was born in 1838 or '39. He lived near Moscow and he came to America and Alaska...When my great-grandfather moved from Kolmakovskiy to Holy Cross he stayed.

#12b: They said they moved around and they end up by Mount McKinley and from Mount McKinley they start coming down. And probably stopped at Nikolai, that's how they got that Nikolai name.

“I am a real Eskimo”; “We have to show how Native we are”; “Four-fourths”

As previously discussed, the most influential modern-day impact on how indigenous people in Alaska view themselves came in the form of the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) and blood quantum as delineated by the Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB or CIB). The documentation of blood quantum was brought up regularly as the measure of “Nateness.”

#3: My mom say I am real Eskimo. When they ask you, say you are real Eskimo, not Russian.

#1a: That's what I put, Alaskan Native, and when they want percentage you put four-fourths.

#16: We in Alaska we always think about how Native we are, you know the blood, CIB, and stuff like that... for us as beneficiaries, we have to show how Native we are.

#20: I am four-fourths of Athabascan Indian from out of Yukon.

With the passage of ANCSA and implementation of the CIBs, people recognized a new system of proving identity. In talking with me people explained their mixed identities and links to both Native and European ancestors. Yet they also understand that in cases where they are asked how much Native they are, four-fourths was usually used, especially in cases where European ancestry was a generation or two in the past. Here identity is socially constructed. Indigenous peoples in terms of how they talk and prove Nativeness have adopted western paradigms of mixed race and blood quantum. But people still think more in-depth about ancestry, kinship, and identity than blood quantum.

Again we must remember that an indigenous view of identity is based on the balance between human, spiritual, and natural realms (Kawagley, 1995) and an axiology (value system) that frames ontology (behavior) and epistemology (beliefs). So it is not incompatible to recognize Russian ancestry and still think of oneself and claim to be Native.

Knowledge and Importance of Ancestors

#12a: I've told them what I told you, because I think it's important that they know that, their ancestry and I told them about the Russian ancestry that they have, the Athabascan, the different ethnic groups if you will that they have. And I think it's important that they know things.

#2: I always tell them when they get together to make sure they don't forget their ancestors, their grandparent and I let them know about my parents, my dad and my mom where they come from and who they are.

#15: I've told them the stories that my dad and mom has told me. Just so they know where they came from.

#18: Yes [I've taught my kids their heritage]. Cause I'd rather they know, then not to know when they find out. I don't want them to be, having a difficult time with me.

Respect for and remembering ancestors is a very strong indigenous value. Families regularly have special meals for their departed loved ones, where the entire community is invited. Special food that the departed ones enjoyed is cooked and often gifts are given in their memory. It is a time when the ancestors join the feast. Selaviq is also a time when ancestors are remembered and join in the celebration. Although Russian Orthodox in origin, this Christmas celebration has been adapted to include feasting and gift giving as a way of remembering and honoring relatives. During my interviews, people stressed the importance of knowing who their ancestors and relatives were and passing that knowledge down to their children and grandchildren.

Theoretical Perspectives on Identity

Indigenous identity is grounded in indigenous values, including relationships with the land, with the ancestors, and with future generations. As stated previously, the relational way of being is at the heart of being indigenous. Wilson (2009) uses a circular research paradigm of indigenous beliefs—ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology—to explain the deep, ingrained indigenous knowledge and way of viewing the world. All elements of an indigenous research paradigm are interrelated and interdependent with the emphasis on keeping relationships in balance, illustrated by Kawagley's tetrahedral framework centering on the balance between the natural, human, and spiritual realms (Kawagley, 1995).

My theoretical framework for identity emphasizes viewing identity through an indigenous value system, which constructs indigenous reality. Brayboy, et al. (2012) state that “the behavioral aspects [ontology] of CIRM are driven by the beliefs [epistemology], which are framed by a value system [axiology]” (p. 437). (A more thorough discussion of CIRM is found in chapter 3.) Similarly, in looking at indigenous identity, I am saying that the axiology (value system) frames ontology (behavior) and epistemology (beliefs).

In an indigenous worldview, values are the lens through which identity is viewed. For instance the blending of Russians and Europeans into the region depended on their efforts to reflect indigenous values and ways of living, standards of behavior, and interaction to the extent that they incorporated and lived with and by the beliefs and values that became integrated and indigenized.

Identity is used to describe a person’s conception and expression of their individuality or group affiliations. An individual’s identity depends on various cultural identifiers. These cultural identifiers examine the condition of the subject from a variety of aspects, including place, gender, race, history, nationality, language, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, ethnicity, and aesthetics (Barth, 1969; Sokefeld, 1999). Indigenous identity cultural identifiers are very fluid and dependent upon the relationships with other realms.

The concept of place is also critical in forming our identity. Place is a critical anchor of how people see who they are and where they are from. We name the important places in our existence and traditional stories are referenced by place. Our families and ancestors are from a particular place. Place is a part of our living history and has an identity of its own. Place is linked to a people's self respect, and how people take care of their place shows the values they have. Our place gives us our identity and roots. We are not complete unless we know where we have come from (Basso, 1996; O. A. Kawagley, personal communication, July 2003). There is a sense of self in place. “Place is a physical construct, but too, place is imbued with symbolism connecting

knowledge, memories, and identities” (Brandt, 2006, p. 340). The activities of Russian ancestors are remembered in relation to place in the overall sweep of historical influences that shaped the local history.

Clearly indigenous peoples of the middle Kuskokwim, as in other parts of the world, have undergone continuous adaptations over time in order to survive. Some changes have had more impact than others. Syncretism, transculturation, and cultural resiliency work as broad theoretical approaches. Cultures do converge, share, and adapt in a process of continual transformation. However, the discussion generalizes culture as a somewhat bounded entity and minimizes the strong reliance on axiology, driving decision, action, and being. “Bubbles” of cultural traits constantly collide and share. Within an indigenous framework culture is less bounded and more fluid. It is also important to emphasize that the indigenous values, beliefs, and practices of reciprocity are the way people characterize, identify, and describe a worldview that is more lived than analyzed, or bounded. Certainly the rich oral tradition teaches not by mapping values but by describing lived relationship actions and consequences.

The challenge with theory, all theory, is it is an activity that attempts to explain in an all-encompassing and bounded way. As such it is not a way of approaching the world, or living the world, as Kawagley and Wilson’s approaches point out and help us do.

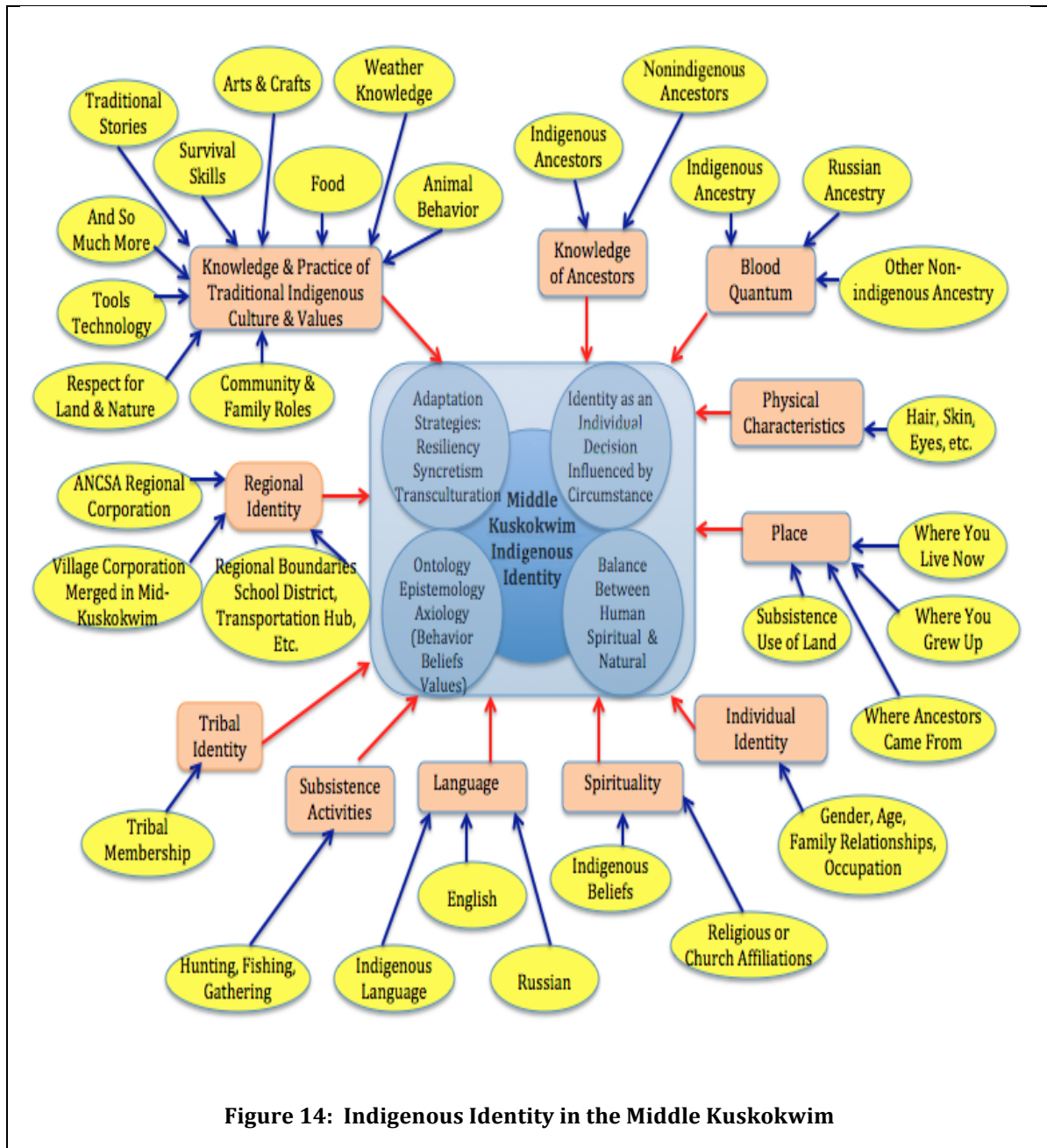
An indigenous identity framework also includes elements such as balance, interpersonal relationships, place, and ubiquitous axiology. Balance between the natural, spiritual, and human worlds is not something that is viewed separately but is considered part of the whole in the approach to situations and relationships.

At the core are traditional values and strong links to ancestry, traditional culture, and place. This can still be seen as people meet and try to establish their possible relationship and connection to one another, asking “*Kit’usit* (who are you)?” Each person shares their parents or grandparents and determines if they are related to the other person, and what type of mutual relationship there is, which

establishes the type of interaction you have with the person you just met. Interpersonal relationships, ways of being, are critical in Native worldview. Relationships are the basis of personal identity: your ancestors, your family tree, and how you are tied into others around you. This focus on relationships, place, and traditional values is the key to ways of explaining indigenous identity, elements that are not incompatible with the change models of syncretism, transculturation, and cultural resiliency.

There is an aspect of constructivist grounded theory that I find applicable to my research, which is the emphasis on the relationship between the researcher and the participant. The researcher places value on the participant as a contributor to the reconstruction of the final model. The researcher is kept close to the participants by keeping their words intact in the process of analysis (Mills, et al., 2006). Charmaz (2008) stresses that the research process emerges from interaction between the researcher and the research participants and that the data are created through the research process (p. 402). As I work through the data, I have found it very insightful to check back with several of the people I've interviewed. I have clarified Yugtun words and places referenced and contacted interviewees who were available via e-mail; I e-mailed them my draft table of contents, and the portions of their interviews I plan to include in the thesis (with no identifying names), and asked them if they feel I have represented their words correctly. Asking for additional information and clarification has proven invaluable and has helped me clarify and more fully understand specific narratives. In the end, I am assuming the critical authorship in defending what was said, and I have compared personal narratives with historical documentation when possible.

The following bubble graphic helps illustrate the very complex pieces that influence identity in the middle Kuskokwim River region of Alaska. An identity framework that views interrelationships as fluid and nonhierarchical illustrates my focus on indigenous axiology.



With this framework I have tried to illustrate the complexity that surrounds identity in the middle Kuskokwim. The blue bubbles surrounding Identity in the middle Kuskokwim (Adaptation Strategies, Influence of Circumstances, Ontology/Epistemology/Axiology, and Balance) influence how the other bubbles affect identity.

The pink group of bubbles that are connected to Identity include the intricate framework of culture and values (knowledge of ancestors, place, spirituality, language, subsistence, knowledge and practice of traditions) that feed into identity. Also affecting identity are issues of blood quantum, regional and tribal identity, physical characteristics, and individual identity factors.

The yellow outer circle of bubbles represents the aspects of identity that we can observe. It is important to note that connections could be made to other aspects of identity. For instance “respect for land and nature” is connected to “knowledge and practice of traditional indigenous culture and values,” but could also be connected to “place” or “subsistence activities.” Thus the framework is even more complex than depicted above.

It is important to remember that the bubbles in the graphic are bounded, but they are meant to reflect a fluid mixture and process. How the bubbles intermingle is shaped by circumstance and adaptation strategies such as cultural resiliency, syncretism, and transculturation as individuals try to maintain the balance between human, spiritual, and natural spheres. In my particular study I have found that the axiology (value system) frames ontology (behavior) and epistemology (beliefs). While this may not be a uniquely indigenous perspective, the strong emphasis on place and relationships as people embrace their ethnicity, traditions, ancestral roots, and religion form the basis of indigenous identity.

My study illustrates the indigenous views on the complicated aspects of identity in the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska, using people’s axiology, ontology, and epistemology to frame their identity. Those who were interviewed expressed indigenous values as the core of identity, including respect for elders and others, knowledge of family tree, respect for land and nature, practice of Native traditions, honoring ancestors, humility, spirituality, and importance of place.

Summary

My study addresses the following research questions: What impact did Russian explorers, traders, and Orthodox clergy have on the middle Kuskokwim River region of Alaska? How has Russian influence changed over time, and how has this Russian heritage impacted present-day cultural identity in the middle Kuskokwim region? In posing these questions an expanded framework for indigenous identity has emerged that looks at how people in the region define their identity and what is important as they define this identity.

The Russian impact is still felt in the middle Kuskokwim, especially in the presence of the Orthodox Church. The aspect most associated with Russian ancestry is knowledge of Russian Orthodoxy and church traditions, which are often mentioned as important to pass down to children. This of course is a direct link to Russian heritage and often pointed out as the main thing that is remaining from people's Russian past. Native values did not conflict with Orthodox beliefs and each village church developed its own unique way of doing things, preserving local traditions, which helped the church survive and thrive. Still, as can be seen by the interviews, Russian or other European ancestry is considered and indigenized.

The indigenous people of the middle Kuskokwim have a long history of cultural adaptation affecting their ontology and epistemology as people adapt and change how they do things. Adaptation and survival have been part of life for thousands of years, as people moved around, scrimmaged for territory, engaged in warfare, and dealt with shortage of resources. Through all of this, value systems and cultural identity are still present. Value systems, axiology, are the most persistent part of culture. Ontology and epistemology can change and adapt, and can integrate new ideas while still maintaining this indigenous rootedness.

It is the emphasis on this indigenous rootedness axiology that is at the core of middle Kuskokwim identity. Western theory gives an explanation of what's going on. Indigenous methodology is a way of being, a way of approaching research questions that bridges the abstract and the lived. Indigenous methodology helps us

be in a place to learn and know and come up with theory and explanation that contains the critical element which is the community sense of itself. My graphic helps to illustrate the complex factors that influence identity.

In the end, Russian heritage has been absorbed into the local culture especially in the area of religion. This Russian heritage has been indigenized into a deeply rooted sense of place, ways of being, and expression of native culture. It is this indigenous rootedness that is at the core of identity in the middle Kuskokwim.

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Appendices

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter



Institutional Review Board

909 N Koyukuk Dr. Suite 212, P.O. Box 757270, Fairbanks, Alaska 99775-7270

(907) 474-7800
(907) 474-5444 fax
fyirb@uaf.edu
www.uaf.edu/irb

January 17, 2012

To: Ray Barnhardt
Principal Investigator
From: University of Alaska Fairbanks IRB
Re: [232336-2] Russian Impact on Cultural Identity and Heritage in the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska

Thank you for submitting the Revision referenced below. The submission was handled by Expedited Review under the requirements of 45 CFR 46.110, which identifies the categories of research eligible for expedited review.

Title:	Russian Impact on Cultural Identity and Heritage in the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska
Received:	January 17, 2012
Expedited Category:	7
Action:	APPROVED
Effective Date:	January 17, 2012
Expiration Date:	January 17, 2013

This action is included on the January 19, 2012 IRB Agenda.

No changes may be made to this project without the prior review and approval of the IRB. This includes, but is not limited to, changes in research scope, research tools, consent documents, personnel, or record storage location.

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form

Russian Impact on Cultural Identity and Heritage in the middle Kuskokwim region of Alaska

IRB #(232336-1)

Date Approved (January 17, 2012)

Description of the Study:

- You are being asked to take part in a research study about how Russian heritage is important in Southwest Alaska. The goal of this study is to learn how Russian heritage has affected your life. You may have Russian relatives or you may have heard stories about the Russians. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have. This form can also be read and explained to you.
- If you decide to be part of this study, there will be discussions and interviews. You will be able to decide if you want to be interviewed alone or want to talk with students present. Sometimes there will be group discussions with other Elders. You can decide if you want to also share information at that time. Most of these interviews will take place within the next two years.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

- I will be careful not to make you feel uncomfortable. You can stop the recording at any time, and the interview recording can be destroyed at any time during or after the interview at your request. You will also receive a copy of your interview. The University of Alaska Fairbanks will also keep copies of the interviews for 5 years.
- The benefit to you for taking part in this study is that your cultural knowledge can be passed on to the younger generation. Others are also interested in the history and culture of our area.

Confidentiality:

- If you want, your name will be kept confidential, but your identity may not be confidential since an audio tape will be made. Any information with your name attached will not be shared with anyone other than myself or my advisor.
- I will use a number instead of your name. Original research will be stored in locked cabinets at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.
- Information from your interview may be used in presentations and publications but your name will not be used unless you give permission.
- Recordings will only be shared with the school if you give written permission.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

- The decision to take part in the study is up to you. If you decide to take part you can change your mind and stop at any time. You may also withdraw from the study at any time during or after the interview, without any penalty.

Contacts and Questions:

- If you have questions now, you can ask me now. If you have questions later, you may contact myself or my advisor, or Dr. Ray Barnhardt at UAF Center for Cross Cultural Studies (rjbarnhardt@alaska.edu 907 474-1902)
- If you have questions or concerns about your rights, you can contact the UAF Office of Research Integrity at 474-7800 (Fairbanks area) or 1-866-876-7800 (toll-free) or fyirb@uaf.edu.

Statement of Consent:

I understand the above. My questions have been answered, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been provided a copy of this form.

_____ I DO want my name used in this research _____ I DO NOT want my name used in this research

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent,

Date

Appendix C: Additional Kuskokwim and Russian References
(Not Used in This Thesis)

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